# Canadian students in Cuba

# CANADIAN STUDENTS IN CUBA

## Introduction

During the first week of July, 1964, forty-five Canadian students from across Canada, arrived in Cuba for a two month stay on this controversial island.

The group represented Canadian universities from Fredricton and Halifax on the east coast to Victoria and Vancouver on the west coast. The students represented fifteen campuses in eight provinces, and courses in engineering, science, accountancy, medicine, political science, philosophy, liberal arts, psychology, sociology, law, schoolteaching, library and theology.

In most cases, the students have been active on campus in organizations such as Student Christian

(sic, missing - ed.)

ment ot Philosophy, the Reverend Robert Carter,

University of Toronto Instructor of Philosophy, the late Professor U. Leo of the University of Toronto Department of Italian and Hispanic Studies, Mrs. R. G. Riddell, University of Toronto Overseas Student Advisor, Professor W. Whitla of York University Department of Humanities and English, Mrs. Edith Guild, York University Lecturer in Spanish, Reverend Roy De Marsh, general secretary of the Student Christian Movement, Jane Blanchard, staff member of the Toronto SCM, Captain David Middleton MC., MM., CD (retired), NDP candidate in the federal elections of 1962 and 1963, and Vernel Olson, founder and chairman of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee.

Active inquiries were received from over 125 students, many of whom could not go because they could not afford to take two months off from summer employment. From the inquiries, almost 60 applications were received including several from high school students. Of those selected four were high school students.

The task of selecting the students was a very rewarding experience for the committee. Each student was asked to detail his or her reason for wishing to participate in the tour. This, along with interviews wherever possible, provided the basic information for assessing the worth of each candidate. The letters showed a high level of interest in the Cuban Revolution from several points of view. The reasons given were by no means standard but they did have one thing in common: all wished to assess the Cuban experiment first hand.

That the tour met a broad response among students is attested to by the fact that most of the students chosen had no previous connection with FPCC. (40 out of 45). The Committee asked for no prior commitment from the students.

The present publication is composed of voluntary literary contributions. Every student was asked to submit a contribution and none was rejected. Several other students indicated a desire to write something but were unable to meet the deadline which had already been delayed.

The money required for this publication has been made available as a result of large and small contributions from friends of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in Canada and the United States. *by Vernel Olson*

SOME OF THE 45, ASSEMBLED IN MEXICO

DAVE MIDDLETON ADMINISTERING

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ALL PHOTOS THRO THE COURTESY OF FRED STEVENSON

**CHRISTOPHER FAHRNI**

In the Cuban people, we found a simplicity we had not known in Canada, where most people, however stupid, assume an air of sophistication. It seemed even a naiveté. People stared. Everywhere out of Havana people stared. They weren't used to foreigners.

As we walked by, they shouted guesses of nationality: 'Czecho!' 'Russo!' 'Frances!' Sometimes we became tired, especially the girls, of being stared at, but most often we accepted this as another side of the openness and generosity that made Cuban girls so quick to sing for us, or the men so quick to offer as a gift almost anything we admired, and another side still of a puritanism which let Cubans be shocked when Canadian girls swam in their clothes, or Canadian men took off their shirts in the back of a truck.

But we saw how this naiveté strengthened the Revolution. They take it for granted Cuba is the most beautiful place in the world. When he landed in 1492, Columbus apparently said so. The first questions people asked you in the street were always: 'You like Cuba?' 'You like Fidel?' 'You like the Revolution?'

They are so proud of their Revolution. They identify with it. Often on meeting us, they would pull out their militia card to show. At a beach near Santiago, in mock water-horseback fights, excited Cuban boys would mob us, crying 'Con Fidel! Con Fidel!' And at Manzanillo, in the prologue to a fist fight with a Finnish sailor, a tall Cuban, held back by friends, was shouting: 'Soy Cubano.' Yo! 'I am a Cuban.'

In Canada, how long would people call each other 'companero'? After one day they would be making jokes on it. How long would they sing revolutionary songs, or say the slogans? Not long. It's well to be individualistic and chic, but . . . but some simple kind of sincerity is missing.

Not only aiding the Revolution, this simplicity was in it from the beginning. The very concept of going into the mountains and starting a revolution—how naive of Fidel! Can you imagine someone leading a handful of men into the Canadian Shield to begin a national insurrection? Nobody conceives so boldly here.

To act requires a certain simplicity. You must just do it. Do it, and not let your mind be snagged in a complexity of possible consequences or justifications. They must be considered in deciding the form of the action and if it is worth the risk, then dismissed. You know the action that must be done, you just worry about doing it. The Cubans are like this now. Before, most were probably as inactive and cynical (as to the possibility of real and sincere political change through their own doing) as most Canadians are now.

But their people have experienced revolutionary violence, and from this has come a maturity we don't have here, one the people of Quebec may get. They are free from an embarrassment about action that we have, free from an embarrassment about love of their country that we have. Now they will shoot to defend it. They've already seen their own blood. They've seen men die. And they've become deeper. The precariousness of a man's life has been brought into swift clear focus.

And this shows their support for Fidel Castro. I think, if they felt his government oppressive, they would try to shoot him, as they tried to shoot Batista. He knows this. He said it himself: 'They say I am a dictator. Show me another dictator who will give arms to his people.'

So they are more simple than we are, and better. Because they can and will act. Because they put their sincerity in their hands.

## BRIAN RANDS

A group of forty-five Canadian students went to Cuba this summer with two purposes in mind. One was to demonstrate the solidarity of Canadians with the Cuban Revolution by volunteer work, the other was to learn as much as possible about the revolution and pass this on to other Canadians. With help from the Cubans who arranged our trip, we traveled around most of the island and were free to see what we wanted. We talked with peasants on the farms, workers in the cities, and people of all occupations and backgrounds.

We spent two weeks in Havana studying the situation in schools, factories and hospitals, and talking with administrators in the government. The result of this was that we got a very good picture of what Cubans are like and of some of the amazing things they have accomplished in five years of revolution.

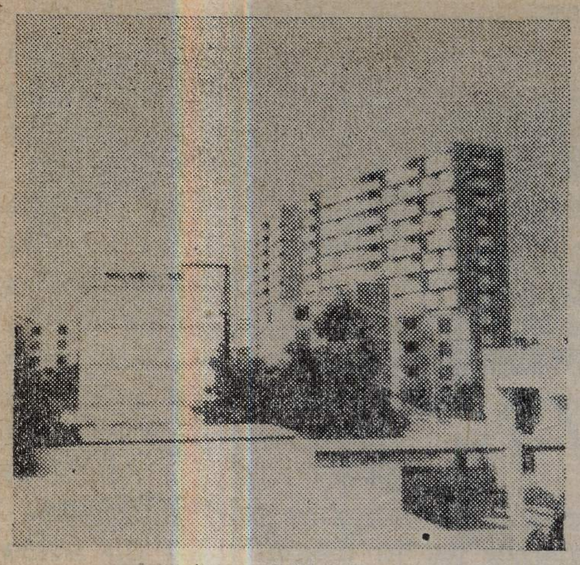
We then traveled around the country visiting state farms and private farmers, observing the astonishing benefits being reaped by the people from the land reform. When we stayed in a small town for a few days we always made good friends and took part with them in town sports, huge chess matches, wild carnivals, dances, and private parties.

One week was spent living in the university dormitories in Santiago, where there was a week-long carnival and Fidel's mass meeting with hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic people on July 26. Here we met Cuban students as well as 'invitados' from all over the world coming to experience the revolution.

For eight days in the Sierra Maestra mountains we worked at laying the foundation for a new school building in a wonderful place called 'school city'. Here we ate, slept and worked beside Cuban workers and learned the conditions and atmosphere of a worksite in Cuba.

From all these experiences and many more several general impressions held true throughout the island. Cuban people have really been given a new lease on life since the revolution. In all fields of administration and production, right down to the isolated farmer, Cubans are excitedly grasping for knowledge and new ideas. People are very conscious that they are forming a new society and they are extremely receptive to new thoughts and methods of achieving it.

This atmosphere carries over into all fields, and the accomplishments of the revolution thus far in education,



health, housing, food, agrarian reform and the very important step of democracy are all amazing.

It is very difficult to talk of the Cuban achievements in terms of the overall welfare of the people without getting very excited and making things sound very rosy. But Cubans will be the first to point out their mistakes and the present wrongs in their society. It is very common to hear from Cubans conversations about what Fidel's worst mistake was, and what was wrong with Guevara's latest speech, and what they are doing themselves in their various organizations to correct these things. Many things need to be changed yet in Cuba, but Cubans realize this and are changing them.

Because we traveled a lot and met Cubans in every position, we learned many aspects of the new Cuba. In answering our many questions, which people were glad to do, we were told of the foods that were gradually dropping off the rationed list and the sufficiency of even the rationed foods. We were often reminded, with great feeling, of the conditions before the Revolution. We often visited people's homes, seeing the improvements in the old houses and the many new and very modern homes. East Havana has a very large group of apartments being built up steadily since the revolution. It houses families that have come from the worst slums in Havana, which have now been cleared out. Here and everywhere else in Cuba housing is paid for with 10% of one's salary. In the case of a new building, the tenant will own it in twenty years, and for an old building, he will own it in five years.

In the country one can see the people who have probably benefited most by their revolution. The peasant in the cane fields is now working on a state farm with free housing, an all-year 'round job and a steady salary. Private farmers who rented their land before the revolution had it given to them and are also unbelievably better off. Maybe best of all, these people now have a very active community life with the time and the inclination for play, and with a desire for participation in their farm and the affairs of their country.

Probably the most common criticism of Cuba is the so-called "police-state" atmosphere. First of all, one of the most striking things for me in Cuba was the ease with which people would denounce the revolution to me. Obviously because the Cubans fear that they still might lose all they have gained, there is a watching and checking of counter-revolutionaries. But this is done in a very different way than one associates with a "police-state." It is carried out by committees which were spontaneously formed in a time of crisis in Cuba. These Committees for the Defense of the Revolution are elected on each city block by all the people living there. Considering the situation, could it be done in a different way? Cubans themselves dislike the bad aspects of this but they are doing it themselves—by the great majority of Cubans, because they feel it must be done. When the infamous American invasion occurred these committees played a vital role in rounding up counter-revolutionaries during the crisis. Nasty but necessary, and when the Americans decide to get off Cuba's back and give her

a chance, Cubans will be happy to remove some evils forced on them by her powerful neighbor.

When talking about democracy it is a mistake to think in the blacks and whites of the North American press which condemns any country undesirable from their point of view as a "ruthless dictatorship." In a country like Cuba one must keep in mind the type of government which kept them at a level of starvation and despair, from which they have had only five years to climb. Also the tremendous pressure placed on Cuba since her revolution has not given it the best chance to achieve democracy. Cuba does lack some basic democratic rights and Cubans are already beginning to think more and more in this area. One need only point out that elections were not held in the United States for twelve years after the American revolution, whereas Cubans are already starting thier elections.

Democracy and the prospects for democracy in a country can be determined by many factors and a study of Cuban politics shows positive things in areas where even Canada is slow. First of all democracy means the state of mind of a nation's people. Cubans are a dynamic and involved people who care about their country as a whole and the people in it. They are interested in the details of their changing society and have many forums for expressing their own ideas on change. These are the very prerequisites of democracy. Also Cubans have a great many rights which not only should every human have by right, but which are necessary for democracy — such as free education right through university, free medical services, and housing based on salary. These things even Canadians don't have. Thus, one can see the excellent basis being set up in Cuba for democracy in the real meaning of the word.

Because this basis is so sound, manifestations can already be seen toward the building of their society in more concrete terms. Elections are held in Cuba from every person's place of work. From workers in factories to traveling actors, everyone helps to elect a member to the United Party of the Revolution which runs the affairs of the nation. The emphasis in the elections is usually placed on electing the hardest worker and the person most concerned about his country. It is a very serious undertaking and the Cubans are electing a group of new revolutionaries who are sincere and hard-working with the interests of Cuba always in mind.

Another aspect of Cuban democracy which is not used in Canada because of the difference in economic systems, is the system of workers' control in factories and on farms. Cubans elect the administration of their place of work as well as discussing the plans for production, etc., and voting on them. We visited factories where whole schemes had been turned down or completely revamped, and where incompetent administrators had been removed by general meetings of the employees.

Cuba already has a good foundation for a growing system of democracy which points to excellent things in its future.

*This article appeared in three instalments in The Prairie New Democrat Commonwealth.*

NATIONAL SCHOOL OF ART — NEXT 5 PHOTOS

## ROGER BRUNET

Students in Cuba are very different from students in Canada. Generally they are more studious, more politically conscious; never are they apathetic. There are many reasons for this.

Competition in study, called emulation, is highly stressed in school. Every class has a vanguard: the best student of the month. The exact opposite to the vanguard is the worst student of the class; this unfortunate one is given a huge placard to place in front of his desk, the same way the vanguard has a placard announcing that he is the best. With such discrimination between the good and the poor it is socially advantageous to study.

Materially the exceptional vanguard student may receive up to a month of all expenses paid holidays at whatever beach or tourist resort he may choose.

Since tuition is free, the majority of students prefer to do volunteer work during the summer. This consists of teaching, welfare work, or guard duty. Girls as well as boys serve to guard campus exhibitions, community banks, jewelry stores, and shopping centers.

A common sight anywhere in Cuba is a girl in her teens lugging a rifle over her shoulder, dressed in the green fatigues of the militia, complete with heavy military boots. Unpaid volunteer work such as this is a practical demonstration of the Union of Communist Youth, whose motto is: work, study, gun.

Vanguard students, chosen for their superior marks, good comradeship, participation in volunteer work, attitude towards life, all belong to Communist Youth. In Canada, vanguard students are scholarship students.

For recreation between the demanding hours of study, Cuban students have a full variety of sports facilities to choose from. The facilities in any of Cuba's three universities are certainly as effective, numerous, and varied, as at Carleton University or Ottawa University.

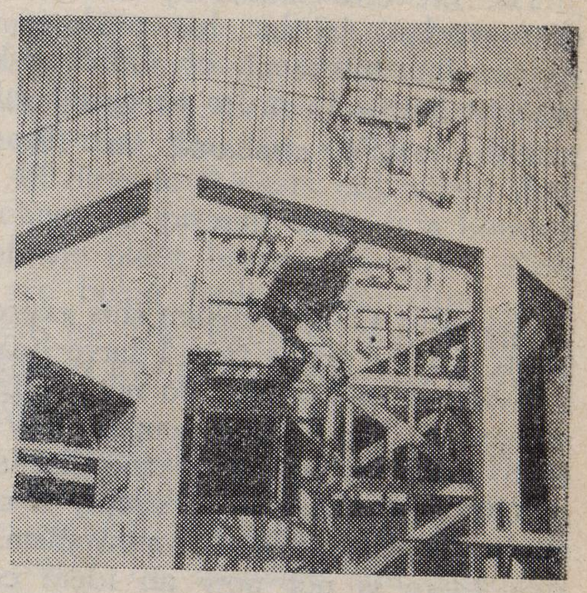
Cuba's three universities, Havana, Santiago and Las Villas, have a total enrollment of 20,000 students. The Cuban student population can best be thought of as a bottle: the primary and secondary school population of over 1,500,000 forms the body of the bottle, and the university student population forms the neck of the bottle.

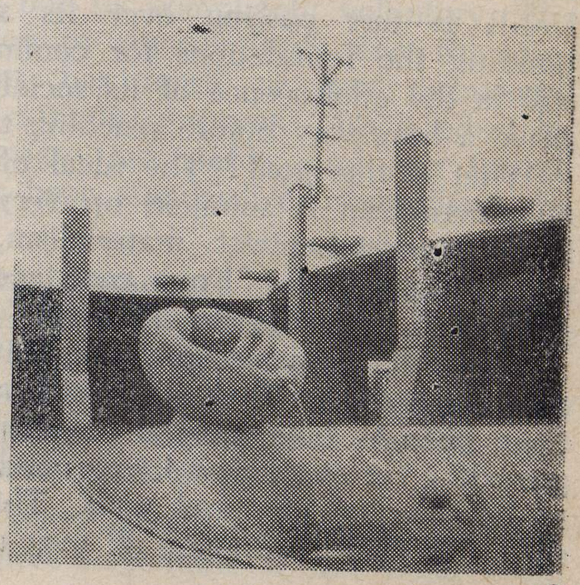
Cultural presentations are numerous in Cuban schools. For example there are music and song exhibitions; the music is to the Mozambique dance rhythm and the songs are of Fidel and the Cuban Revolution. Revolution songs are fast, rhythmic, and delivered with machine-gun enthusiasm.

During the summer holiday evenings, students gather in the open air of university residence terraces, to sing and pound chair tops to the accompaniment of guitars, until the early hours of the morning.

Drama presentations by the students themselves are frequently presented in the universities and in the Schools for Instruction of Art. There is no shortage of material for stage props or sculpturing, and all is provided free by the state.

It should be realized that in Cuba, students are a privileged class and receive the best of what the state can offer: for example, free education, art supplies, etc. Courses in Marxism-Leninism are not offered until the





university level; nevertheless, the social sciences are Marxist oriented during primary and secondary school.

In kindergarten children are taught patriotic songs about Fidel and the Revolution, as well as catchwords and phrases. These are instilled and remain through the years. Their favorite is "patria o muerte - venceremos," or "country or death—we shall win."

Raised in an atmosphere of political activity and crisis Cuban students are aware of what America and Americans stand for. This is one of Cuba's national characteristics, and it is even more true for the students: they can discuss U.S.-Cuban politics by the hour.

Adults in Cuba disagree widely over the merits of the Castro government, but every student I met has been for Castro. Although they approve of the government, criticism of it is very much alive.

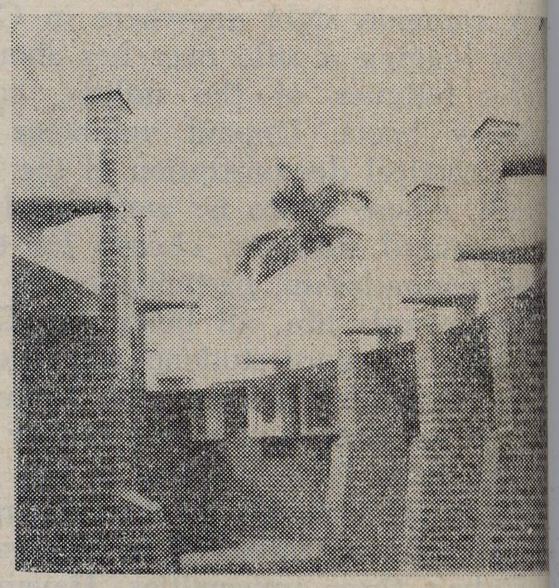
Many Latin-American students are on scholarship in Cuba. For example one girl was studying international law and would return to Guatemala to help her people, who she claimed were victims of American greed.

Most students from South America in Cuba study technology; on the other hand, a great number of Cuban students study technology in Russia. Also, the better Cuban university athletes are well traveled and have visited Latin America as well as Russia on exhibition tours.

If the student is unable to pursue his studies, the alternative is simply the army where he begins at $80 a month, plus room and board. Thus the Cuban army absorbs the not too intelligent, as well as the career soldiers.

The great difference between the Cuban and Canadian student is that his work is directed consciously to the improvement of Cuba, while in Canada the student learns in order to enrich himself in the future.

*This article appeared in The Ottawa Journal.*



**FRED STEVENSON**

"Socialist Cuba"—when this expression is uttered, and often are the times that I have heard it exchanged, the individuals in question do not realize the fallacy in their statement. The Cuban people deny the existence of any such thing as an ideal socialist state. Castro himself reports that socialism is simply a change over state between capitalism and communism. He further admits that there is not now an ideal communist state. The USSR is just passing over its socialist period and building the foundations for communism and Cuba is still in the adolescence of its socialist period, and must strive a long way before reaching the goal.

What is this goal? The ideal of the Cuban concept of communism is summed up very well in an excerpt from Marxist-Leninist materialism, the basis of the revolutionary code. "From each according to his ability —to each according to his need."

The initial response may be that this means milking the people for all they are worth, and throwing back to them peanuts. The ideal is obviously not so. It involves providing for every man living conditions complementary to his way of life, and work. This is the well-known theory of class distinction all over again.

Is Castro a dictator? Can democracy really thrive in a one party system? This must go unanswered. Fidel Castro is the First Secretary of the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba, and the prime minister of the country. This is the highest position in the only political party. As for the second question, there is a political slogan which says "Cuba, free socialist territory of America," and the people believe it. They ask for little more. They are free to choose their immediate leaders, and the party picks the members from the masses who make up the future leaders of the hierarchy. There are no elections, and the people do not seem to demand them.

Part of the system involves the aroused nationalistic spirit. Cuba is in a constant state of alarm, having already repelled one invasion launched from the shores of her imperialistic neighbor. The officials use this spirit of nationalism to keep the people alert and ready, and bound together by feelings of persecution and imminent danger. Buildings are plastered with colorful posters, screaming the glories of the revolution. Large illuminated signs proclaim "patria o muerte" to the open sea. Patriotic songs and slogans are chanted by pre-school children, students, and workers alike.

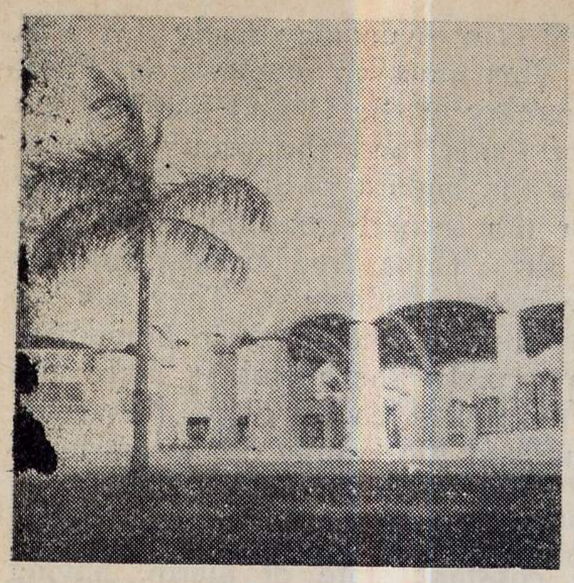
It will probably be suggested that this is to keep the minds of the people off the internal problems.

The people of Cuba are well cared for by the state. The housing, very little of which is owned by the individual, and his family, is rented from the government for 10% of the average monthly wage of each paid worker. The homes owned preceding the revolution, still belong to the original owners, as long as they are residents of the country. Where both father and mother work, the children are cared for in an institution called "Infant Circle." These care for the children during working hours from 45 days to 6 years old, when they are ready to go to school. At present there is a housing shortage, as many of the older homes are razed. New modern apartments are being built in the cities, and subsequently occupied by the builders and laborers, but it will be an estimated five years before the problem is completely alleviated.

There is virtually no unemployment in Cuba. There is no racial prejudice in either labor, or the civil service. The people put in an eight to ten hour day, and regularly do "volunteer work" on holidays and Sundays, which may or may not be completely voluntary. The pay scale is slightly low by our standards, since the revolutionary government has more or less terminated "tipping" and other capitalist customs. This is offset by the fact that the wages are stable, and fair for all employees, and have been standardized throughout the country.

The people pay an income tax of 11%. This covers most medical expenses, including child birth, operations, dentistry, psychiatric help, and some medicinal expenses. Token fees are sometimes required for consultations in private, and some private doctors and dentists still practice outside the state medical plan.

Cuba's economy is based greatly on her agrarian program. Largest and most negotiable is the sugar crop,



which occupies a high percentage of the available land. The annual harvest of the dark green cane is interrupted every fifth year when the plant must be rooted out, and new young shoots replaced. The harvests are staggered to offset the production, due to increased manpower and the 18 month lapse before harvest of the young shoots.

One other large crop is the hemp plant, used to make rope, an industry which prospers in Cuba today, through the aid of British industrial machines, and a large Canadian market, about one third of the produce.

The agrarian reform bill, when passed, by the revolutionary government, nationalized all the large farms, by putting a limit to the amount of land that an individual or organization could own. The vast areas of land taken over were divided into state farms, which are now worked by the former subjugated peasants who receive a standard wage for their toils. They are allowed to raise their own small livestock on "their" land.

Some of the larger farms are still allowed to exist, provided that they can produce one and one half times the national average of any crop per acre.

The country is now attempting to establish a sound economy, based in part on heavy industry. It is succeeding, with the help of Russia and Czechoslovakia especially.

The blockade has hurt Cuba badly in this respect. American sugar refining equipment, heavy industrial machinery, and commercial vehicles are beginning to show their years, and new parts cannot be secured from the U.S. The people are quick to use this excuse when faced with an embarrassing mechanical breakdown. American 60 cycle electrical mining equipment is being operated by fifty cycle Russian generators, driven at six-fifths of their optimum operating speed.

The problems are slowly being overcome in most fields. There is now in operation a Russian spare parts factory, which makes the vital pieces, for the industrial machines. Each piece is designed and constructed by a work force of Cubans, led and directed by a few Soviet engineers and technicians. The Czechoslovakian contributions include a spark plug factory and a refrigerator assembly line, with most of the parts made in Cuba. Russia is assisting in the construction of a thermo-electric power plant, which will eventually supply power for the steel mills on the north harbor of Santiago de Cuba. Much of the raw material comes from

Cuba, and the heavy machinery is imported from England, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and China. The time will come when one no longer sees lightbulbs dangling from bare wires, ripped from modern American flourescent light fixtures.

The transportation in Cuba is mostly via public transit system. This includes British buses, Czechoslovakian buses, railroads, some of which are operated by 1925 coal and steam engines, and an airline, which flies Britannia four engine planes up and down the island.

There is very little private ownership of vehicles of any description in Cuba, although the Czechoslovakian Jawa motorcycle is very common. All the government agencies utilize the Russian army jeep for their workhorse. This is used by all who do not have access to the nationalized late model Cadillacs, left behind by those who fled the country after the revolution.

Cuban money, the peso, is worth almost nothing on the international market. This is demonstrated by the fact that American money sells at 14 for one on the black market. The reason for the devalued Cuban money is that the Americans refuse to honor it.

All the Cuban trade is done in American dollars. The stockpile comes from foreign trade and in fares for transportation from Cuba, which must be paid from outside the country, in American dollars. This poses a bit of a problem for Cubans who wish to emigrate outside the Soviet bloc.

All produce which is in short supply, except for that for young children, is national. This has made available a fair means of distribution.

Beef and dairy products are the worst rationed with each individual restricted to ¾ lb. per week of meat. Clothes and shoes follow a close second. There is no ration on sea food and on eggs.

Experimental farms now are working in an attempt to alleviate the shortage, as they have done in the example of the eggs. The people can buy over their rations if they wish. Excellent restaurants are open to everyone, but the prices are very high.

This is the "Year of the Economy."

Education is one of the most notable things about Cuba. Today everyone in Cuba is engaged in education of one form or another.

The whole island has been raised to the grade three level. Illiteracy is now negligable and at present the department of education is attempting to raise everyone on the island up to the grade six level.

There are schools for teachers, doctors, technicians, and skilled laborers, at all of which tuition is free. Most of the students at university have scholarships which pay their personal expenses, and give them spending money as well. You are guided in your choice of course and, generally speaking, assigned to a position when you graduate. This latter is especially true of technological graduates. Failures are out the first time.

The state frowns on you leaving the country, after it has educated you—just like our armed forces.

The workers go to night school where they study languages, management, or skilled labor economics, or political thought and the philosophy of dialectical materialism. Religion, although it clashes with the ideals of atheistic materialism, is tolerated, but not condoned.

A National Council of Culture offers the finer things of life to the intellectual types. Art galleries with magnificent collections are open to public for a nominal charge, and free ballets and concerts are always available in the large cities, and go on tour to the small towns. Museums show the treasures of the revolution, and photography exhibits portray Fidel Castro in hundreds of different poses. The literature of many countries is available in the public libraries, original and translated, along with records and tapes. Drama is available on radio and television—without the benefit of advertisers—and mostly sprinkled with emotional and nostalgic nationalism.

The newspapers are in a bad light. They, as is all the press, are censored by strict government control, authorized in the hierarchy. They are now considered as a propaganda source, even by the Cuban people. Their international news coverage is excellent, but their only provocative issues close to home, are on the merits of different art views.

The works put out by the printing houses are good and educational. They are government subsidized and informative, in a restricted view, on politics, philosophy, and economics and a more general view on technical matters. All are within the budget of the working man.

There is no education, formal or otherwise, for the pure aesthetic satisfaction of gaining wisdom. It is all geared to form the individual to take his position at the oar, such that he will pull and lift when the whip is cracked.

This whole article is a gross generalization, and anyone who knows the country can and will find isolated discrepancies which will contradict me. It is their prerogative to do so.

Since the Socialist Revolution, the people of Cuba are free by some Western and most Eastern standards. Their living conditions and environment have been raised, and they are at their prime, relative to the post-revolutionary era. Their feet are shod, their bodies covered, and their stomachs full. They have money in their pocket and a reasonable amount of intellectual freedom.

I say nothing of their secret police, and their compulsory military duty, and the thousands of people who are shot in the streets every year. If this is what you want, try the American news agencies, or perhaps the *Telegram* is closer to home.

I say nothing about the Canadian newspapers and periodicals who will refuse to publish the truth about Cuba, because of their apparent "political bias," and, of course, their loss of precious advertisement revenue.

Besides, the people of Cuba, who are THEY to demand MY concept of freedom.

*This article appeared in The Carleton.*

## SONIA PUCHALSKI

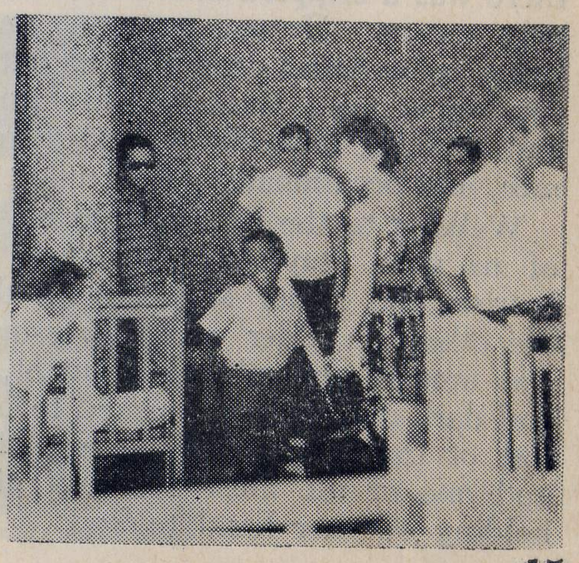
It is rather ironic that, due to American government policy of harassment and attempted prevention of travel to Cuba, any Canadian who wants to go to Cuba has to go through Mexico City first. Because it makes a very good comparison of what the conditions in a Latin American country before its revolution are—and what they are after a revolution. It is something as simple as this: dirty, then clean. You notice that about Cuba and Mexico. Mexico smells. Cuba doesn't.

These are two countries: one with a revolution, and one without. Of course the one without is Mexico, but any loyal Mexican or rightist will tell you that Mexico *has had* its revolution. The one that took place in 1911 is the one they mean. In fact, this revolution has developed so far that it is what they call an "institutionalized" revolution; and that is even the name of the major political party—the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution. Ossified, is what they should say.

Because what has this so-called revolution done for the Mexicans? Almost nothing. Going to Mexico from Vancouver is sort of like going from downtown Vancouver to Skid Row. Mexico is like a million square miles of East Hastings. Well, if you can manage not to see what East Hastings is like, it's not so bad, I guess. But it is a little harder to avoid the fact of poverty in Mexico. You absorb it through your nostrils, all the time. In some places the smell is terrible. No wonder. In the huge *barriada* districts, the slums of the city, where most of the people live, there are open sewers on the streets. And children who have no shoes play on the same streets, beside the open sewers.

The government pretends that it has plans to alleviate the poverty. We went to a government housing project. The guide explained that it was built to house 75,000 of the poorer families. But when we asked further about this, it turned out that the rent charged would be equal to one-half of a poorer worker's monthly wage. Consequently, the apartments are nearly all inhabited by middle-class people and government workers. Which leaves only the slums for the poor people and the unemployed. Or, a lot of them live on the streets. You see children sleeping in doorways and under store fronts.

But the most appalling thing about Mexico is the way people are treated, and the way they treat each other. That, I imagine, is what has changed most, in Cuba. And that is one of the most important things about a revolution, it seems to me. People become



friends, not enemies who take the bread out of each other's mouths, even if they don't want to, because they have to eat themselves.

But if you happen to be someone who regards people only as a source of profit, then you will *never* be able to understand what the Cuban Revolution means. And that is precisely how the U.S. government regards people. And hence it does *not* understand Cuba, what is happening there. The two governments have opposing concepts of what man is. In Cuba, it is the mind and the spirit that count, and not money.

Most of the students on the tour did not like having to be "tourists" in Mexico. That is what we were, of course, to the Mexicans—we looked like Americans because of the way we dressed, and compared to the Mexicans we had money. And so we were treated as tourists.

You want to buy marijuana? or any other drug? or a woman? Just ask a taxi driver, and you will get what you want. But if you take the trouble to look at him, you will probably see contempt in his eyes. For you. For you, white Americans, who think you are the only ones who have the right to hold others in contempt, because others are poorer than you—you white Americans who assume that everybody's goal in life is pink refrigerators and $150,000 necklaces, and then prevent others from getting them because that would spoil the fun for you.

Going to the churches is another bad experience. The basilica in Mexico City is a beautiful building. To which people crawl five miles on their hands and knees. They are doing penance (they would probably be too weak from hunger to be able to walk, anyway). Pregnant women with babies whose arms are as thick as one of your fingers. And if you look like you have money, you run a gauntlet of men and women in the church square who ask you whether you want to buy lottery tickets. If you don't want lottery tickets, perhaps you prefer a crucifix, a rosary, a holy relic or two? Whatever you like, you can get, right down to human flesh. Oh yes, there is a lot of that in Mexico. Cheap. After all, if the girls became pregnant, they are simply killed and buried, and if the police are paid off properly, nothing is said about it. Hardly any overhead costs at all for such a business.

One day we went to the Pyramids of the Sun and of the Moon. At the bottom of the Pyramid of the Sun, there was a crippled man about fifty years old, who had only one arm. He was squatting on a bench, making his living by weaving straw flowers with his toes. An American-tourist type audience was looking on approvingly, and thinking how clever, and weren't the straw flowers nice, and occasionally even buying one or two.

Walking to the restaurant from the hotel where some of us were staying, you passed through a crowd of tourists and richer Mexicans on the one hand, and on the other, an older woman nursing her baby—and this was around nine o'clock at night, and cold and windy and dark out, and she seemed to be settled there for the rest of the night, like the rest of the street-sleepers—and one of the most beautiful girls I have ever seen, holding out her hand to beg.

It is not only the children who have bare feet, either. It is almost any Mexican you care to look at. Except for the businessmen, of course. They are the ones who can look at this mess and think of how much work they can get out of all these starving people before they actually do starve to death. If you are a businessman you do not have any obligations to human beings — you only associate with them if they can be useful to you. If you *did* think about the conditions, you would soon be one of those awful communists, too.

On the topic of feet. There are thousands of shoeshine boys in the city. Children of about twelve years old who, even according to Mexican law, are supposed to be in school. But they aren't. They are trying to make enough money to eat. They are usually shining the black, already-shiny shoes of some businessman, who isn't thin like the children usually are, and who doesn't even seem to notice that the child who is shining his shoes exists —he calmly reads his newspaper, or if he hasn't a newspaper, looks over his head or straight through this human being at his feet. He might notice as he goes away that his shoes look nicer than when he came.

After all this, it might be interesting to tell you that Mexico is considered the richest of the Latin American nations, and has the highest living standard.

But there is still some hope. On the drive back into the city from the Sun and Moon pyramids, I counted about twenty signs, painted on fences, in support of Cuba. Usually they read *VIVA CUBA*, or *VIVA FIDEL*. And there was one sign that said, *OUT WITH BETANCOURT*. The revolutionary movement does exist. And the United States government is doing all it can, though certainly inadvertently, to promote the revolutions in the Latin American countries.

This is what I saw in Mexico: immense poverty, filth, disease; workers with no jobs; children who if they do manage to live through their early years, have no chance of going to school; women who are constantly bearing children they have no money to feed; people who live on the streets because they have no homes to go to. Even the dogs are starving.

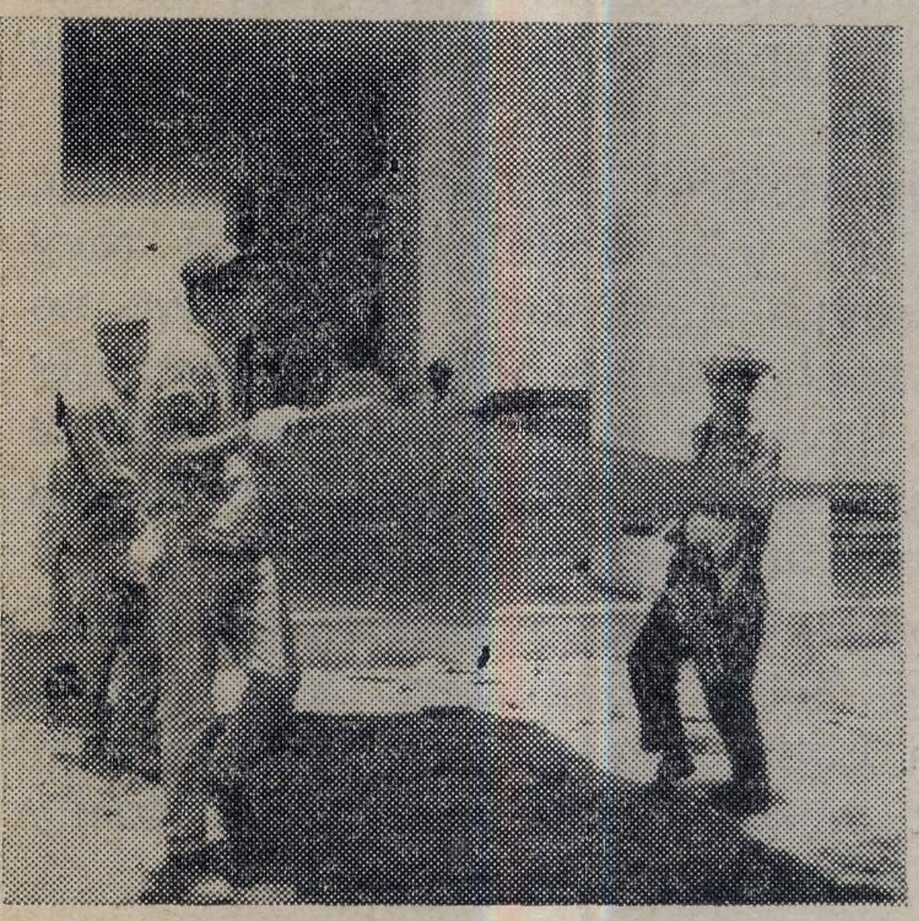
In Cuba, which six years ago was poorer than Mexico, I saw all these things being eliminated. And that is what a revolution in a Latin American country, as anywhere else, means: it means that people there finally have the right to live as men and women.

# BILL JOHNSTON

During the past summer I had the privilege of seeing Cuba's tremendous progress since 1959. Before I went I knew almost nothing about the true Cuba. American news reports had said that the Cubans are a captive people, uneducated and starving; they have no elections; Castro is selling out to the Russians. These fantastic lies were all that I and most of the rest of Canada knew about this amazing country in the Caribbean.

Naturally, when I got to look at Cuba for myself, these tales were crushed. The Cubans are not a captive people. If anyone wishes to leave the country he must pay his fare in U.S. dollars and must give up his money and belongings to members of his family still in Cuba, or, if he has no relatives, to the people of Cuba as a whole. He can take only three suitcases with clothing and small personal belongings in them; no Cuban currency can go with him. If this person ever wants to return to Cuba, as many people do now, he must start a new life. The belongings which he left behind will not be returned. It is only natural that the Cubans would be quite willing to let these people leave the country. They serve only as a hindrance to the progress of the revolution, as they are usually members of the old ruling class who were put on pensions when their businesses were nationalized.

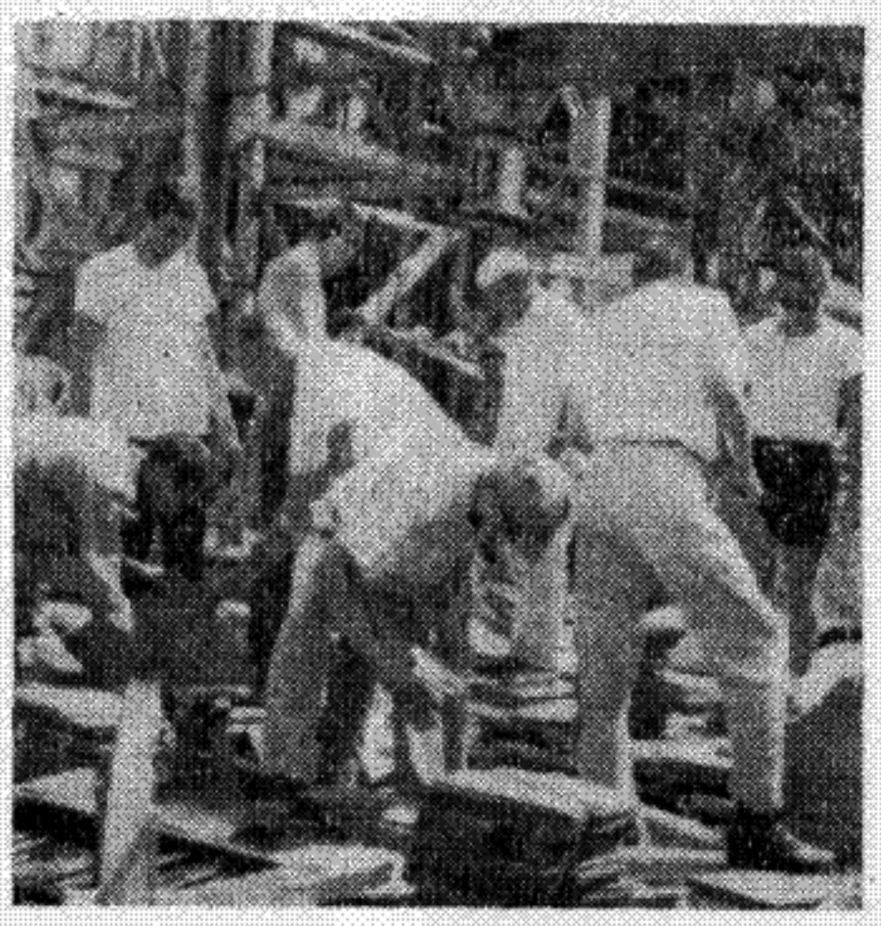
The story that the people were starving became quite amusing when we ate with the comrades on a construction site in the school city Camilo Cienfuegos. Mounds of rice and stew, as well as other vegetables and fruit, were heaped on each plate; I don't think I ever finished a meal while I was there. Rationing ensures that everyone has a full stomach, and although at times the food lacks variety, there is always more than enough to go around.



Over three thousand new schools and school cities have been erected since the triumph of the revolution; before the revolution nearly half of the population had little or no education; now illiteracy is no longer a problem. Everyone can get as much education as he wishes in Cuba today, as it is completely free from start to finish. The people who are able, pay for the university books at cost price. The others are on scholarships where fees, room and board, books, clothing and spending money are supplied by the Cuban people.

It is true that the Cubans do not have elections as we know them in Canada, but in 1969 they plan on having this type of vote. Now in Cuba there are elections daily in factories and on state farms. Vanguard workers are elected by their comrades and these men can enter the national party, PURS (United Party of the Socialist Revolution), if they so desire. Committees are set up by the workers to discuss the methods by which the foremen direct the organization of the work. If complaints are raised and found valid the foreman is punished. Nowhere alse in America do the people have such control as in Cuba.

The Cubans have a power that exists nowhere else in the world among the masses. Almost everyone has a weapon of some sort and so it is easy to conclude that



if Cuba is as bad as the Americans say, the people would rise up and destroy the system. Instead of doing this, the Cubans spend many hours each week guarding their factories and farms from acts of sabotage. The government has to be good or the Cubans would quickly throw it out.

There is much talk in our newspapers about Cuba becoming another Russian satellite. Although much machinery and many technicians are in Cuba from the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia and other east-European countries, this equipment is under the *control* of the Cubans. The Cubans have lived under the yoke of American imperialism for too many years to fall under the control of another power again. With the Americans leading the blockade against Cuba she has only Europe and Asia to turn to for trade.

Cuba is truly the light of America; a land of strong happy, patriotic people who mean it when they shout "Fatherland or death, we will win!"

**RUTH TATE**

"In Cuba, you see the real world."

I scribbled this note down one night in Havana. We were sitting in a broadcasting booth in Cuban radio station "Progresso." Robert F. Williams, exiled American Negro leader, was on the air.

"Freedom, freedom, freedom now—or death." Williams finished speaking, sat back. In Havana, Williams' program, "Radio Free Dixie," was almost over, but in the rest of the world, it was only beginning.

The voice of Williams, who left the United States pursued by FBI men authorized to arrest him on a transparently trumped-up "kidnapping" charge, reaches into the deep south where it brings terror to the Klan and inspiration to thousands of Negroes. Williams has a message, and his message is a unique and unpopular one in the world of civil rights; Williams dedicates his life to spreading the belief that Negroes have not just the right, but the duty, to practice armed self-defence.

Robert F. Williams, as William Worthy wrote in a recent *Esquire* article, is "the archetype of the mildly rebellious Negro who was transformed into a black revolutionary when he saw no concessions made to the moderate programs of civil liberty." The story of this evolution of Williams is a fascinating one. It is happening to masses of other Negroes. We rarely hear these stories. Here, in Canada, the world is apparently made up of petty scandals, advertisements and the hit parade. But in Cuba we found out about the most important thing that is happening in the West today.

Everywhere you go in Cuba you meet people on the move. Towards the end of our trip we visited the Venezuelan FALN youth "mission", as they are called, stationed in Cuba. The FALN is the revolutionary Venezuelan liberation movement and has three groups of guerrillas fighting in the hills of Venezuela; in the city of Caracas, street warfare units have been organized.

The young people at the mission told us a lot about

the history of Venezuela — a history which has many tragic parallels to pre-revolutionary Cuba. Large areas of land uncultivated; the primary industries of Venezuela —oil, bauxite, iron ore and aluminum—employing 7,200 workers in oil alone, owned by Standard Oil, by U.S. Steel, by Bethlehem Steel.

In 1958 Betancourt promised agrarian reform. Instead, the Venezuelan said, he began a process called the "Iron Law of Hunger" which provided an increase in taxation imposed on the working masses resulting in a 30% increase in the cost of living.

They spoke also of the last elections in Venezuela. You'll remember that our press and T.V. at the time made a great hullabaloo about the huge turnout at the polls, seeing it as being a great blow against the FALN and a victory for "democracy." But the Venezuelan youth informed us of the real facts. In order to vote the citizen had to have in his possession a card; when voting the card was punched indicating that the person had voted, and then came the clever twist to ensure a large vote—without the punched card the voter could not get a job; he was likely to get fired; he couldn't use the banks; and the final touch was that he couldn't go to the movies.

And still 25% of the Venezuelans, they told us, responded to the FALN's appeal to boycott the elections, and stayed away from the polls.

"Move, baby," said one of the Black Nationalists of the American student tour to one of the Canadian boys. The jargon sounded like James Baldwin and the Negro was big and sounded tough. He probably was tough, being a product of the ghettos of America's northern cities. He was a follower of Malcolm X whom he and his friends referred to as "Malcolm" in much the same way the Cubans called Castro "Fidel." The Canadian boy moved. People usually did when the Nationalists told them to. People knew that these people meant business, meant uncompromising struggle. They demanded respect, and they usually got it—and not only because of their color.

I remember one night at a party in Santiago de Cuba. I had begun what I considered a highly interesting conversation with one of the Nationalists about the novels of Baldwin. In the middle of one of my better points, a Negro girl came up to us. "Well, hello," said Charles and was soon telling her about how the Negro woman was the most exploited creature on the face of the earth—"she is doubly exploited."

Have you ever become non-existent? It is an incredible experience and rather beautiful to see when it means, as it did here, a passionate devotion to an ideal which transcends conventions, manners; which moves directly and forcefully to the point, without hesitation, without the remotest embarrassment. So there is commitment after all, in our apathetic society. We saw it, again, in Cuba. . . .

Cuba is a natural place to go for people who have commitments. The Cubans are immensely committed to building socialism in their country, and this desire spreads through the roots of the entire nation. In Cuba you can talk of social revolution, even for that holy of holies, America, without embarrassment. In Cuba also, you can meet Vietnamese, and hear about U.S. foreign policy from the people who have to live under it. In Cuba, in short, you run face to face into the other side. The Sino-Soviet dispute is acted out, not by Western commentators, but by actual participants. The phrase, "the colonial revolution" ceases to be an empty one when you spend an evening singing by the pool with young Angolans—who happen to be in exile.

A trip to Cuba teaches you that socialism is not just 90 miles from home—it's all over the world, it's very serious, and very real, and shares with Cuba that spirit which is summed up in the word "Venceremos" — we will win.

## LARRY BANKS

*Question*: How did your friends react to your decision to go to Cuba?

*Answer*: Very few people knew I was going until about a week before I was due to leave. The reason for this being that I could not really believe I was going to Cuba and therefore didn't tell many people. When telling friends of my proposed trip, I received mixed feelings. Some people thought it was a great opportunity and wished that they were going with me; others thought I was crazy. Quite a number of individuals were quite convinced that if I ever returned to Canada that it would be in a pine box.

*Question*: Before you went to Cuba did you feel that the revolution had set out to achieve genuine reforms, or did you feel that it was just another Latin American "coup d'etat"?

*Answer*: I think it is fair to say that I was quite uninformed as to what has actually happened in Cuba from 1959 and as to what the situation was at the time just prior to my visit. It is difficult for any person living in Canada or the United States to know exactly what has taken place in Cuba, and without this knowledge it is just about impossible to pass a valid judgement. From what I read in the local newspapers, I had formed certain misconceptions about the Revolution.

*Question*: What were your main impressions of Cuban (a) industry? (b) medicine?

*Answer*: While in Cuba I visited several factories and had occasion to come into contact with a number of hospitals. Besides the factories that I visited per-

sonally, there was others that the bus merely went by but did not stop at. Of the factories that I toured I was quite impressed with the newness and general quality of some of the machinery that I saw; much of the new machinery had come from such countries as Czechoslovakia, Russia, Germany and China. There was also a fair amount of U.S. equipment that had been there before Castro took over.

I visited one factory where they made electrical appliances such as refrigerators, electric stoves, toasters, etc. I also visited a spark plug factory, a factory where they made spare parts for their machinery which was worn out, a cookie and chocolate factory, and last but not least, the Bacardi and beer factories. In connection with the industrialization, I saw a new thermo-electric plant under construction, and it was supposed to be able to supply electricity to one or two of the provinces.

From the medical standpoint I believe certain advances have been made, the most noticeable being the abundance of small hospitals and medical outposts in rural areas. I was told that before the Revolution only the cities had hospitals and that it was nearly impossible for a person from the country to get into one because of the expense. Now all medical services are free. I was also told that there have been 42 new hospitals built in rural areas in the last five years and that each of these had about a 30-bed capacity.

One thing that bothered me, though, when I was in one of the hospitals, was the fact that some of the equipment could not be used because of some small missing part. For example there was a large light used in the operating room that was lying in a corner because the bulb had burned out. There seems to be a strong emphasis on technological advance. Many students are studying to become technicians and engineers, and science is "the" thing.

*Question*: Were you in contact with the Cuban universities, and what was your reaction to them and their students ?

*Answer*: I had contact with many of the universities and teacher-training institutions as well as close contact with many students, some high school, some university. My first and lasting impression of the students was their attitude toward studying and learning. Nowhere have I seen such eagerness to learn. There is a sharp contrast as compared to the typical Canadian student. School lasts for eleven months of the year and university nearly as long; and instead of two or three classes a day, students usually put about eight hours in the classrooms and more on homework.

My reaction to the university buildings was generally one of astonishment, to the newer ones at least. They were not the fallen down, dilapidated buildings I had expected to find in an underdeveloped country, rather they were well constructed from both an artistic and a functional point of view. Marble floors and steps were common as was the beautiful landscaping in many instances. I lived in the men's residence for nine days at the university in Santiago de Cuba and was quite comfortable, once I got used to the plywood bunks and two-inch thick mattresses.

*Question*: Did you notice that morality seemed to be lacking because of this?

*Answer*: This was rather hard to determine. Morality seemed no worse than in any Canadian city of today, and in many cases it was of a fairly high standard. I met a number of people whom we would not class as morally good individuals, but I also encountered some of the traditional system in the smaller towns. That is, when a girl went on a date, she was often accompanied by her older sister or mother. It was not considered the proper thing for a girl to go out alone on a date in some instances.

*Question*: Did you meet any Canadians or Americans working in Cuba?

*Answer*: Yes, I met a number of both Canadians and Americans in Cuba, many more than I had expected to find. Some of these people were working there full time, and others were there as tourists. I met a number of reporters from both the United States and Canada.

*Question*: Did they seem disillusioned with the progress of the Revolution?

*Answer*: Generally speaking most of the Canadians and Americans working there seemed quite happy with the progress that has been made in the last five years. I think that most of the people who were merely visiting went back home with favorable stories to tell.

I met one person working with the Medical Aid Reception Committee in Havana who was exceptionally enthused with the progress made in medical services. This individual introduced me to a number of other people who were working with the Cuban government and they seemed quite happy with the work they were doing. One doctor informed me that he got a great deal of satisfaction working with the Cubans because they appreciated his services so much.

*Question*: We hear of a food shortage in Cuba. Is this food shortage great enough to cause severe hardships?

*Answer*: I don't think so. There are food shortages, though, and they are felt by a great majority of the Cuban people; but I don't think they could be termed severe, not by Cuban standards anyway. I am afraid many Canadians might consider the situation as severe, but by Cuban standards there is enough to eat. Practically all foods are rationed, especially meat and dairy products. For example, each Cuban is rationed three-quarters of a pound of meat a week and only a few ounces of butter a month. There are special provisions made for children to get plenty of milk.

Our group spent a week working, sleeping, and eating with construction workers, and all the workers seemed to get plenty to eat.

*Question*: Did the Cuban people appear to be afraid of the government?

*Answer*: This question is really hard to answer, mainly due to one reason: people who had genuine complaints against the government would hesitate to tell their troubles to total strangers. I did meet people, though, who spoke quite strongly against Fidel and the Revolution. On a few occasions I was taken to dark alleys and other secluded places where some of the people expounded on the evils of the Revolution. As I say, though, there is some doubt as to the complete validity

of all these statements. I must say though that the majority of the people did not seem to be afraid. Most people seemed to give their whole-hearted support to the government.

*Question*: Do you feel that Cuba has progressed in any way?

*Answer*: Yes, as I have already mentioned, there is an improvement in the medical system as far as the peasants are concerned because they can now get medical attention. There is a great improvement in the educational system. People who are now 30 or 40 or more who never had the opportunity to study are now learning how to read and write, and all young people have the opportunity to go to school and college for free. As a matter of fact, it is difficult for a person under 18 to get a job because he is expected to be in school.

I saw many new housing developments which leads me to believe that some improvement has been made in this area even though housing still remains one of the biggest problems. Generally speaking, I would say the workers now are getting higher wages than before. On the whole, I would say that Cuba has progressed to some degree in the last five years.

*This article appeared in The Athenaeum.*

## MICHAEL BROWN

In April of this year, when the Fair Play for Cuba Committee circulated pamphlets and application forms for a student tour of Cuba, I filled out an application and was accepted.

I believe that now I am in an ideal position to assess the advances of the Cuban revolution. Cuba to me was not new. I had been in Havana in July of 1959 and July and August of 1962.

The ICAP (Institute of Friendship of Foreign Peoples) of the Cuban government handled the tour and provided us with two buses and four guides and made all arrangements as far as necessary for hotel reservations. Upon our request they made plans for us to see the things we wanted to see, and set up interviews with government officials.

Cuba is, and always has been, one of the world's leading producers of sugar. In 1959 Cuba had a one-crop economy — sugar. The livelihood of the whole nation depended on that sugar cane. If the crop failed, the Cuban farmers would starve. This was a situation which had to be changed. The revolutionary government undertook a program of industrialization, and with foreign aid factories have been, and are being built. In Santa Clara a tool and die factory has been built. It is equipped with the latest machinery and is producing spare parts for Cuba's heavy industry, and for her sugar mills. These parts used to be purchased from the United States.

There is also in Santa Clara a Czechoslovakian-equipped refrigerator, stove and pressure-cooker factory. These are eight-cubic-foot refrigerators that are being sold in Cuba and the world at reasonable prices.

At Saga de Isabella in Las Villas province there is the only spark-plug factory in Latin America. This fac-

tory, also Czechoslovakian equipped, produces all the spark-plugs for Cuban consumption—for both American and other vehicles. In Santiago de Cuba a hydro-electric plant is under construction. This is a Soviet-designed and-built plant which will provide all of Oriente province with electricity both now, and in the future.

New plants have been built, and the old ones have been modernized. This provides maximum production and efficiency. These are only a few of the vast industrial reforms sweeping Cuba. In this respect Cuba will be prepared for the future.

The majority of Cuban land was originally held by large land owners and companies such as the United Fruit Company. Only in a few cases was the land owned by the farmers. After the revolution much of this land was dispensed among the small farmers. The sugar cane fields were organized into co-operatives. The co-operatives later became state farms. On the state farms the farmer is given a home to live in, and a salary, and also enjoys the benefits of community life such as free schooling and social life. But the farmers who originally owned land did not have to sell it, and 30% of the land in Cuba is still in the hands of private owners.

Instead of the only crop in Cuba being sugar cane, now rice, tomatoes, and corn are also grown. Each harvest comes in at different times of the year. Thus the seasonal worker is employed all year, whereas before the revolution he was employed only three months of the year, and the other nine months were called the "dead months."

Mechanization is now sweeping Cuban agriculture. Before 1959 there were no harvesting machines—now rice, corn and sugar-cane harvesters are being used. They have two hundred sugar-cane harvesters, and by the end of the year they will have three hundred more. Next year they will have an additional six hundred. Fourteen hundred 30-horsepower tractors have been purchased from Bulgaria this year. In 1965, another six hundred will be put into use.

Cuba now has 5,000 head of beef cattle from Canada, and is planning to enlarge its supply to 20,000. Only 5% of Cuban farmers and country inhabitants ever ate meat before the revolution. Now they all receive a ration of meat each week. Milk was once available only in the cities. Now all children receive a ration of milk per day. Fidel Castro has said that Cuba plans to have over one million head of cattle.

Rent on homes and apartments is 10% of the workers' salary. After twenty years the workers own the dwellings. When a worker is off work due to illness, or an accident, he receives 50% of his wages if he is in hospital, and 75% if he is at home. Unemployment has been wiped out, and there are shortages of help in many fields of employment.

It must be stressed that contrary to American newspaper reports, the Cuban people are not held captive. Fidel has said that if the U.S.A. is so worried about these captive people why not send a hundred ships to take them away. The U.S.A. has put a quota on the number of Cuban immigrants that may enter the U.S.A. As far as the Cuban government is concerned, all those who want to leave first have to obtain visas, the correct

papers, and airplane tickets—then they can leave.

Cubans are not starving. Yes, meat and milk are rationed, but Cuba is at war with the United States, and rations were imposed on *Canada* during the last war. Even before the revolution the majority of Cuban people lacked milk, meat and proper foodstuffs. Only the rich could afford to eat well.

These facts I have pointed out are only a few of the many wonderful things happening to Cuba. It should be realized that it is only five years since the revolutionary government came to power. In these five years Cuba has had to beat off American-backed invaders at Playa Giron. She had to destroy the mercenary killer bands in the Sierra Maestra, guard herself against saboteurs, and endure an economic blockade thrown around the island by the U.S. All these and more have been overcome to produce the first Socialist Revolution in the Americas. Viva Cuba!

I am grateful to the Cuban people, and all of those who helped to make the tour possible. Special thanks go to the Canadian Embassies in Mexico City and Havana for their much appreciated help in custom matters and in obtaining visas. But there is no way I can fully show my appreciation for a most unforgettable and enlightening experience, and for the many dear friends I have made. All I can say is I am very grateful and will remember it the rest of my life.

**JACQUIE HENDERSON**

Camilo Cienfuegos School City covers miles of the foothills of Oriente province's Sierra Maestras. When we arrived, students were already living and studying in the completed school units. It is Cuba's most ambitious educational project, and when finished, it will serve 20,000 Cuban agricultural students.

At Camilo Cienfuegos, we were not *invitados*, or guests — we were workers. We stayed in the workers' barracks, ate in the workers' dining room, and worked with Cuban workmen.

Our previous volunteer tasks were little more than symbolic gestures. They had brought us in first-hand contact with Cuban workers, but the Cuban economy had not benefiited greatly from our efforts. By the time we reached the School City, we had been experiencing for almost a month the unlimited generosity of the Cuban people, and we were anxious to return at least a token of what we had been given.

The first day was the hardest: the sun was hot, and the construction work was heavy and tiring. Soon we emulated the Cuban custom of slowing down for the hottest hours of the afternoon. I suppose we were rather strange looking because the workers stared at us at first, but soon we became *companeros*. They flooded us with questions about Canada, and said how pleased they were with Canada's resistance to U.S. pressure to join the OAS and to discontinue trade with Cuba. We were a little embarrassed, knowing how much Canada's trade has diminished in the last few years.

The most sombre worker in our unit was tall, and Spanish-looking, and continually smoked a cigar. Marco,

a small, wiry Cuban, nicknamed him, "El hombre del cigaro", and we all teased him because he was so serious. Marco wore a Saint Christopher medal and a crucifix, and called himself a *communista*. He seemed to know exactly what we were doing, something we weren't always sure of, so we decided that he was some kind of foreman.

At lunch hour, when we had finished eating, we spent the rest of our time in the workers' center. The center sold *refrescos* (pop), *cafe*, and *chocolate*, and had a television set. While we displayed our blisters, we could watch cartoons, women's fashions, or cooking shows. Often we were too tired to do anything except sleep on the floor. At the end of the day, we were so exhausted we simply piled into bed, but the Cubans spent hours more at classes, taking part in the massive Cuban educational campaign.

ON CAMILO CIENFUEGOS SCHOOL SITE

Of the nine days we spent at Camilo Cienfuegos, we worked seven. In the middle of the week, Marco, El hombre del cigaro, and the other workers in our unit brought the girls a cake—if Canadian girls could shovel sand, tie reinforcements with wire, and haul rocks, then Cuban men could bake a cake, or at least buy one.

Before we left, the workers got together and decided to pick three Vanguard Workers from among the Canadian volunteers. Ruth Tate, Andre Beckerman and myself, were so honored, with Bob Mahood, Dave Adams, and Fay Fraser, getting a sort of honorable mention. Vanguard Workers are those who have been chosen by their fellow workers as the most conscientious. They are given rewards such as holidays at Cuban resorts, and are respected throughout Cuba. After being elected for three months, they are eligible to represent their fellow workers in the United Party of the Socialist Revolution of Cuba (PURS).

The director, who had first expressed doubts about our ability to last, said we were welcome to stay another month. We were flattered, but we couldn't accept either the opportunity to continue working on the site or to take advantage of the Vanguard award.

The time we spent at Camilo Cienfuegos not only gave us a greater understanding of revolutionary Cuba, but it also demonstrated the atmosphere of the revolution—above all, the people care about each other. Leaving the school city, I thought of the popular phrase addressed to the dead leader of the revolution for whom the school is named:

"Things are going well, Camilo."

## MICHELLE SAUNIER

Cet été je suis allée à Cuba avec 45 étudiants Canadiens dont 8 Canadiens français. Le voyage était organisé par le "Fair Play for Cuba Committee" et s'adressait aux étudiants des universités à travers tout le Canada. C'est le gouvernement Cubain qui assumait toutes les dépenses de séjour et de transport.

On nous demande souvent pourquoi un tel voyage ? Du point de vue des étudiants il s'agissait avant tout d'un voyage d'information. Nous voulions aller voir par nous mêmes ce qui se passe à Cuba. Evidemment cela

impliquait que nous mettions en doute, à des degrés divers, la version américaine des évènements. En effet les revirements, les contradictions et les excès de la presse depuis 1958 offrent matière à réflexion.

D'autre part pourquoi ce voyage mais du point de vue des Cubains cette fois ? Il m'a semblée que c'était tout simplement pour nous montrer "leur" Cuba et par là tenter de rétablir la vérité. Ce qui se passe à Cuba, nous l'avons constaté sur place, ce n'est pas tout à fait ce que la plupart des journaux nous en disent! Certains accusent le gouvernement Cubain de faire ainsi de la propagande. En admettant même que ce soit de la propagande, pourquoi n'utiliserait-il pas les mêmes armes que ses adversaires ? Cependant il me semblerait beaucoup plus juste de dire, à la suite de mon expérience de cet été, qu'il s'agit de se défendre. Ils ont le droit et même le devoir de le faire.

Mais revenons à la réalité cubaine telle que nous avons pu l'observer au cours des deux mois qu'a duré ce voyage. Nous sommes allés d'un bout de l'île à l'autre, de Pilar del Rio à Santiago, en visitant toutes sortes de centres, en discutant avec les Cubains et même en faisant du travail volontaire à la campagne, dans des usines et sur des chantiers de construction d'un centre écolier. Nous circulions dans deux autobus avec nos quatre guides en charge du programme qui d'ailleurs a été modifié plusieurs fois à notre demande. Les visites étaient très variées encore que certains jours trop nombreuses à notre goût à cause de la chaleur. Mais il s'agissait de nous montrer les réalisations de ces six dernières années et elles sont nombreuses, tant dans le domaine de l'éducation que du bien-être social, tant dans l'industrie que de l'agriculture.

A coté de ce programme il nous restait beaucoup de temps libre pour nos explorations personnelles. Cet aspect du voyage e été peut-être le plus riche et le plus passionnant encore que les deux aspects soient indispensables pour avoir une idée valable de Cuba. Ce n'est pas en visitant une usine que l'on peut le mieux "sentir" ce qui se passe, que l'on peut évaluer l'attitude psychologique et sociale du cubain vis-à-vis les transformations spectaculaires de son pays. Il y aurait beaucoup à dire et choisir n'est pas facile. Mais ce qui frappe tout le monde en premier lieu c'est l'acceuil chaleureux, la spontanéité et la gaité du peuple cubain. Ils ne demandent qu'à parler et répondent de bonne grâce à toutes nos questions qui parfois étaient indiscrètes et très maladroites quand j'y repense avec le recul du temps.

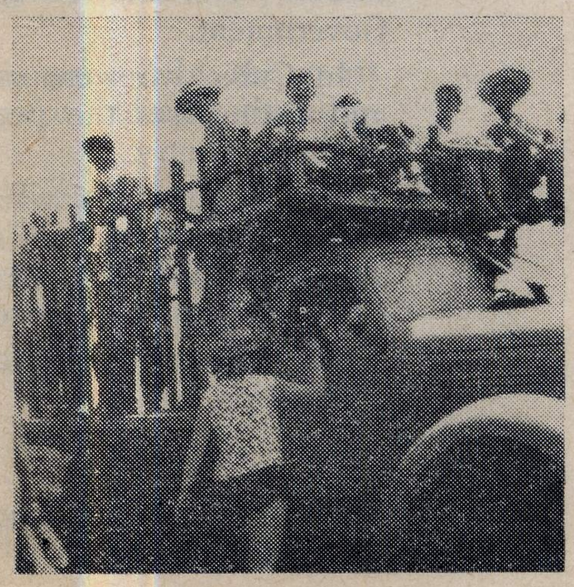
Ils nous posent eux aussi beaucoup de questions sur le Canada. Ils veulent surtout savoir ce que l'on pense de Cuba. Cette préoccupation constante montre combien les Cubains sont sensibles à l'isolement politique et économique imposé par les Etats-Unis. Chacun d'entre nous s'est vu adressé cette prière: "tout ce qu'on vous demande en rentrant dans votre pays c'est de dire la vérité sur ce que vous avez vu". Ce rejet de la communauté américaine est certainement une ombre au tableau de leur satisfaction.

Ce qui frappe ensuite le plus les visiteurs c'est l'enthousiasme de nos hôtes. Il sont fiers, et je puis dire à juste titre, de ce qu'ils ont réalisé en cinq ans en dépit d'un ouragan terrible (200 morts, la moitié de

la récolte de café et 11,000 maisons détruites 21,000 autres endommagées) et en dépit du blocus économique. Ils ont confiance en l'avenir de leur pays et en leur gouvernement.

Cet enthousiasme se manifeste concrêtement dans leur volonté de s'instruire tant chez les jeunes que chez les adultes, dans leur travail et surtout dans le travail volontaire. En effet en plus de huit heures habituelles, de nombreux Cubains font du travail volontaire, c'est à dire libre et non rémunéré. Cela peut vouloir dire travailler une heure en plus par jour, ou en fin de semaine ou encore pendant les vacances, soit dans l'industrie soit à la campagne. Prenons comme exemple le travail que notre groupe a accompli cet été.

Nous avons ramassé du mais, travaillé dans des usines à porter des sacs de farine, a mettre des gateaux en boite, à rouler des cigares, à nettoyer des bureaux . . . Enfin, ce qui était plus dur par manque d'entrainement et à cause de la chaleur, nous avons participé pendant dix jours à la construction d'une cité écolière destinée à recevoir 20,000 étudiants du secondaire, au pied de la Sierra Maestra. Les garçons maniaient le pic et la pelle avec plus ou moins de dextérité alors que les filles poussaient la brouette et fixaient les armateures des toits. Mais pour le Cubain le travail le plus recherché est de participer à la récolte du café et d'aller couper la canne à sucre, parfois tous les dimanches pendant les 3 ou 4 mois que dure la récolte. Certains fonctionnaires en profitent pour prendre leurs vacances à ce moment. Les citadins en parlent plus ou moins comme d'un sport salutiare et les femmes comme une cure d'amaigrissement ! Peu importe la raison invoquée en riant le travail ce fait et le pays s'en trouve mieux.

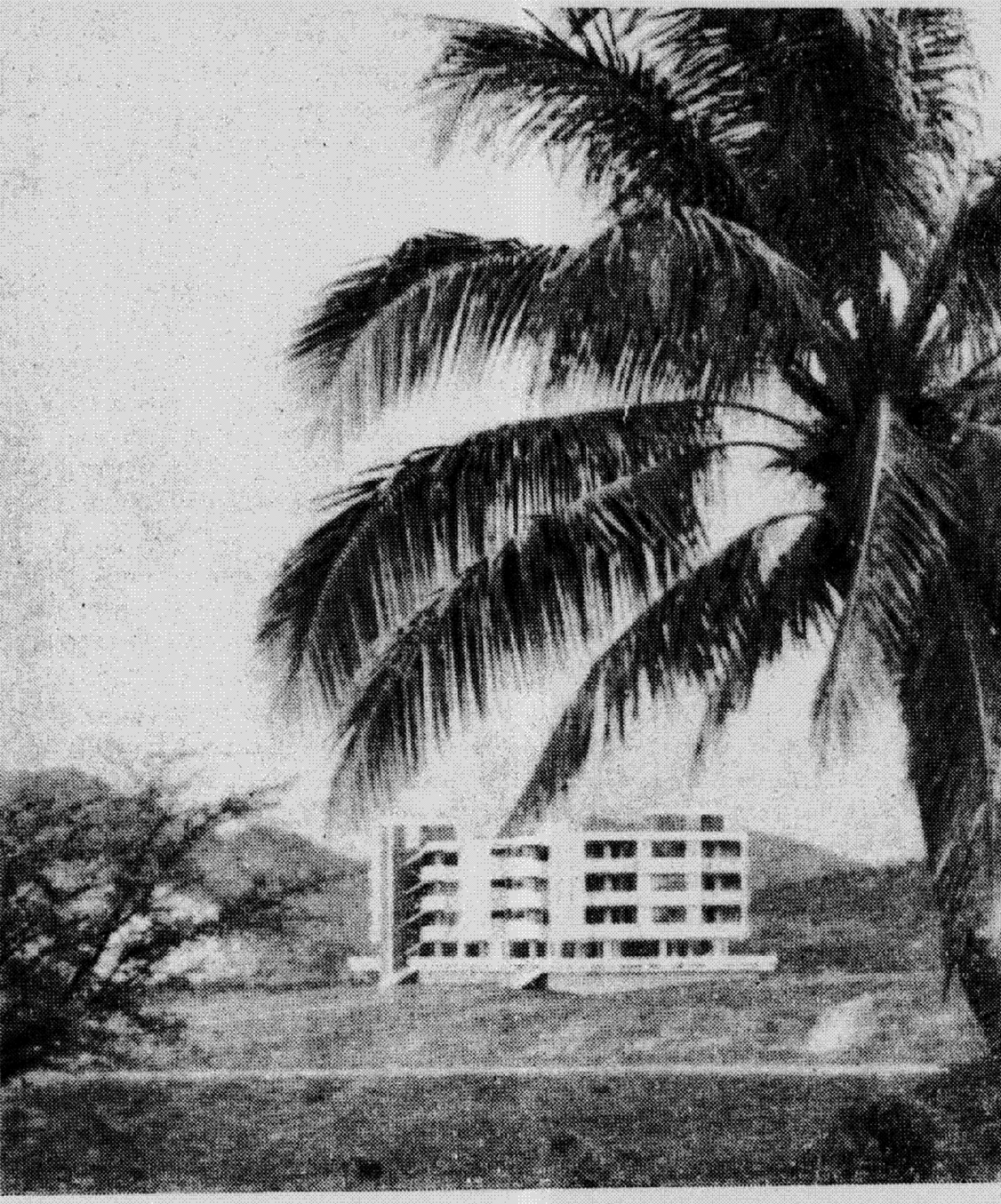


La milice est également une charge volontaire qui attire nombreuses personnes. Certains pensent que les Cubains font cela pour la gloire et l'uniforme. Il se peut que cela joue au début mais le milicien ou la milicienne doit payer son uniforme, monter la garde six heures par quinze jours, en général devant l'édifice où il travaille ou un autre point stratégique. De plus entre temps il y a les exercices de marche, de manipulation et les maneuvres de sécurité. Nous sommes loin de la gloire et beaucoup plus près d'une prise de conscience par le volontaire de ses responsabilités. En effet il s'agit avant tout de protéger le pays d'attaques et de tentatives de sabotage venant de l'extérieur.

Ici j'aimerais répondre à une question qui revient souvent: "Est-ce qu'il y a un régime dictatorial à Cuba ?"

Je n'ai certainement pas eu cette impression. Et pourtant nous sommes restés deux mois avec une très grande liberté de mouvement.

De plus certains d'entre nous ont recherché avec beaucoup de conviction ce qu'on aurait pu vouloir nous cacher. A notre demande on nous a ainsi fait visiter un centre pour prisonniers politiques. D'autre part les déclarations des gens qui venaient nous rencontrer pour nous dire qu'ils étaient contre le régime n'étaient pas très convaincantes. Trop souvent ils ne travaillaient pas avant la révolution et encore maintenant beaucoup d'entre eux vivent d'une pension à vie de $600 (salaire de Fidel Castro) que le gouvernement leur verse pour



# THE DECLARATION MADE BY THE

We students of Canada are very grateful to the Cuban people for having given us the opportunity to witness their revolution first hand.

We have talked, worked and celebrated with Cubans from all walks of life, and have come to feel that the Canadian people hold several misconceptions about Cuba. We have found that:

1. The Cuban people are not held captive. An overwhelming majority of the people support with enthusiasm the revolution and Fidel Castro. The Cuban people are armed, and accustomed to political violence. If Castro were unpopular, the existing regime would be overthrown.

2. The Revolution is firmly established. It will not be dislodged by an economic blockade nor by an invasion. When Cubans say "PATRIA O MUERTE", they mean it. Many, many of them would die before they would give up the revolution.

3. The people are not starving. The Cuban diet lacks variety but there is an ample supply of food in all parts of Cuba. Now everyone receives staple foods, and children and old people get special attention.

## E STUDENTS UPON RETURNING FROM

4. Criticizing the revolution is not a crime. In the streets we came across people who freely expressed their disagreements with certain aspects of the revolution, but the overwhelming majority of the Cuban people understand their revolution and are willing to work to overcome any difficulties which face them. Only active counter-revolutionaries are punished.

5. Any Cuban is free to leave his country, provided he obtains his fare in U.S. currency (from outside sources) and after he receives approval from the Cuban Government.

In Cuba, we were especially impressed by the spirit and enthusiasm the people have for building socialism in their country.

We hope Canada will move to better her relations with Cuba, in the form of increasing her cultural and trade exchanges, and of protesting the embargo with a bolder, more independent voice.

We the undersigned express agreement with this joint declaration.

Aug. 29th, 1964

*Note: This declaration was signed by 27 of the 32 returning students.*

# THEIR TWO MONTH VISIT IN CUBA

La délégation du Québec, apres un séjour de deux mois à Cuba, considére que la propagande Américaine à l'endroit de ce territoire est complètement fausse.

Nous avons vu un peuple libre de la faim, un peupie libre de l'analphabétisme, un peuple libre de la corruption, libre de l'injustice et de la misère.

L' "esclavage" de Cuba, c'est la dignité d'être homme, la "tyrannie" de Cuba, c'est la liberté de travailler, la liberté d'étudier a tout âge, sans distinction de couleur de peau ou de classe sociale, la liberté de construire une sociétée juste et libre.

La fierté d'être Cubain, ouvrier ou paysan dans une société où l'industrie se développe et l'agriculture se mécanise, infuse à ce peuple héroisme et courage.

Nous considérons que les articles de M. Taylor dans le "*Montreal Star*" sont une insulte à l'intelligence et à l'honnèteté. Et le produit d'un cerveau à la solde de l'impérialisme capitaliste.

Nous avons vu un territoire libre, le premier en Amérique.

PATRIA O MUERTE, ELLOS VENCERAN

LA DELEGATION DU QUEBEC :

Le 29 Août 1964.

*Note: Tous les étudiants du Québec ont signé cette déclaration.*

les dédommager des expropriations.

Enfin logiquement il semble qu'avec deux millions de personnes armées et un peuple qui a tout un passé de violence que l'hypothèse d'une dictature soit très invraissemblable.

Les moyens dont disposait Fidel Castro pour attaquer Batista étaient risibles par comparaison. En fait les Cubains ne songent pas à renverser leur gouvernement pour la simple raison que dans 80% des cas au moins leur situation s'est améliorée de façon notable depuis 1959. De plus il y a toute une partie de la jeunesse privilégiée avant la révolution qui elle aussi est complètement gagnée è la cause, en dépit du fait qu'elle a perdu ses avantages. L'un d'entre eux me disait: "que voulez-vous, il fallait choisir. Ou bien je partais pour Miami pour vivre entretenu par mes parents et les Etats-Unis ou bien je restais ici *chez moi* pour construire mon pays."

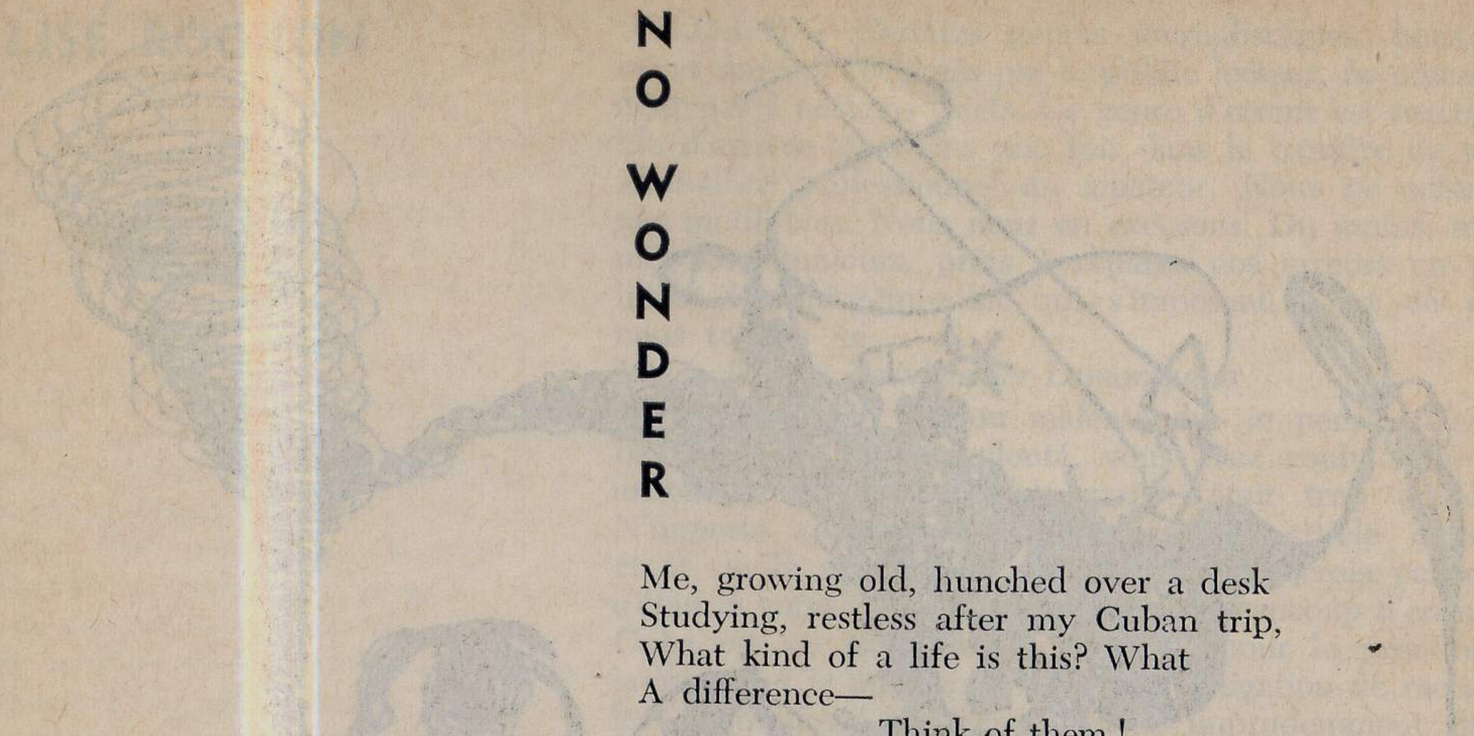
"Vous voyez qu'il n'y avait pas vraiment choix: d'un coté la vie facile et de l'autre la liberté et le respect de soi. Mais je ne vous cacherai pas que pour nous le socialisme est parfois très austère, nous étions trop gatés avant. Pour les ouvriers et les paysans c'est bien plus facile."

Je trouve que ce dialogue résume très bien le problème des gens qui quittent Cuba.

Pour conclure je dirais qu'il se passe à Cuba quelque chose d'extraordinaire, quelque chose très loin de la politique mais qui a été permis et encouragé par le gouvernement. C'est tout un peuple qui prend de plus en plus conscience de ses responsabilités et les assume, qui vit maintenant d'espoir malgré les difficultés qu'il rencontre et qui travaille pour l'avenir.

*Cet article est paru dans l'Echo, organe officiel, Amis des Peuples de l'Amérique Latine.*

# NO WONDER



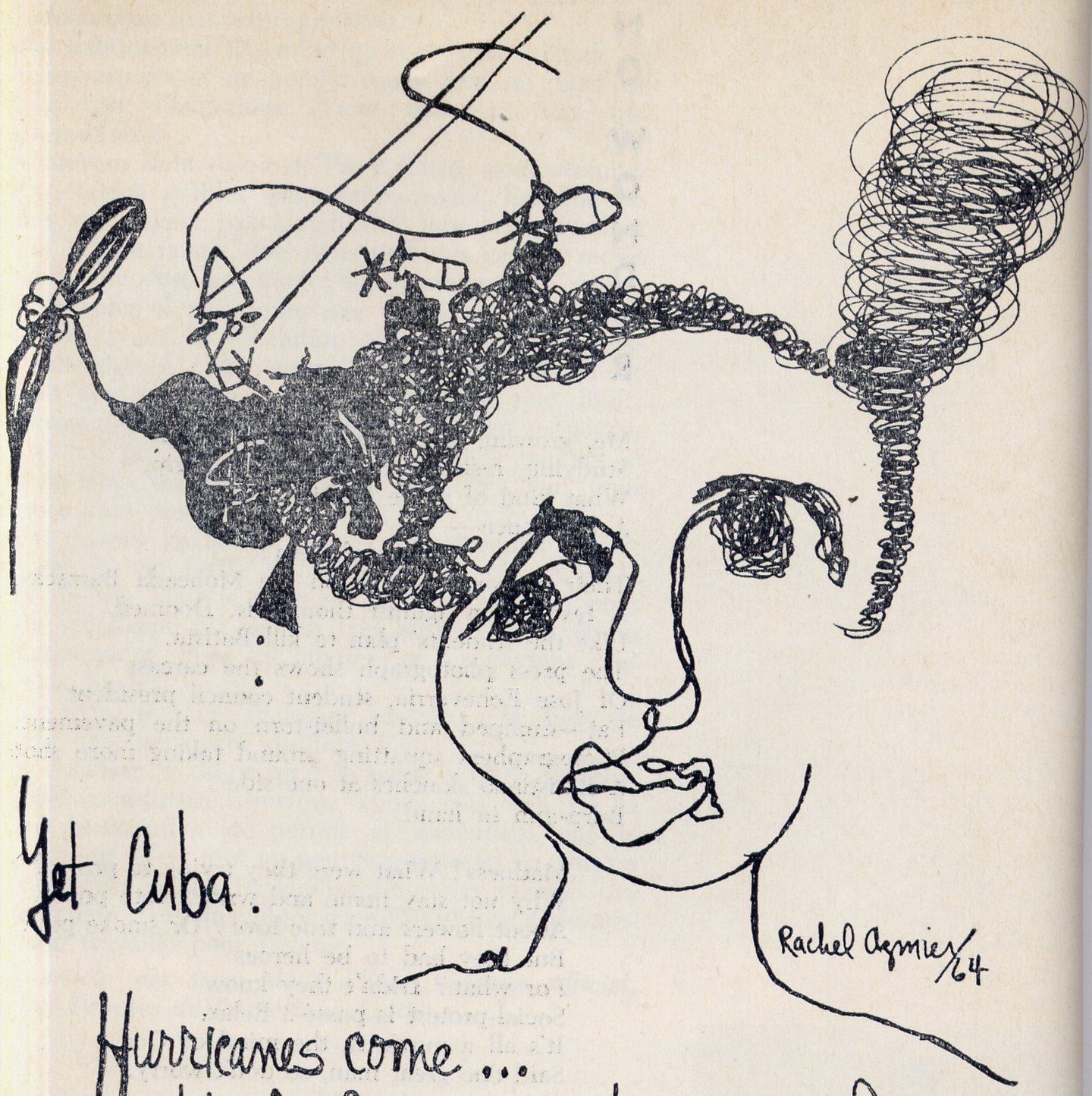
Me, growing old, hunched over a desk
Studying, restless after my Cuban trip,
What kind of a life is this? What
A difference—
Think of them!
Their desperate attack on the Moncada Barracks,
A few dozen against thousands. Doomed
Like the students' plan to kill Batista.
The press photograph shows the carcass
Of Jose Echeverria, student council president
Fat—slumped and bullet-torn on the pavement.
Photographers squatting around taking more shots.
A Batistiano slouches at one side
Burp-gun in hand.

Madness! What were they trying to prove?
Why not stay home and write effete poems
About flowers and true love? Or smoke pot?
But they had to be heroes
For what? Didn't they know
Social-protest is passé? Relax.
It's all a movie in the mind of God
Said one great man, so don't worry.

The imagination, its exercise. Shelley knew
And died with his dream. But in Cuba
It's happening: men of good will
With imagination, running the show—
Where else could someone say, Hey, listen!
Why not build teacher-schools on mountain tops?
And they go ahead and do it; or someone says;
We need books, all kinds, so a young fellow
Flies to Mexico and buys up everything in sight.
Unlimited funds, our libraries are hungry!
And Fidel building more and more schools.
A whole scholar-city in the Sierras,
Putting students in the best buildings in Havana,
Teachers in every tiny settlement,
Doctors—train them by the thousands.
Everybody has a chance now—
Black, white, legitimate or bastard.
Not in fifty years, not your grand-children
But YOU! NOW! Think of that!

Who isn't inspired in Cuba?
No wonder the United States
Has to enforce a travel-ban.

LIONEL KEARNS




Yet Cuba.

Hurricanes come ...
block the sun. drown the flowers.
float a bloated calf ... yet
Cuba can replant her sugar,
rebuild her road.

Supermen come ...
Kill a boy-teacher. Rob lives.
steal some land and
bomb the sweetness from the earth.

## LISÉ ROCHON

N.D.L.R. — Certains genres journalistiques, bons en soi et souvent réclamés par le public lecteur, ne conviennent pas à certains sujets. Ce genre d'erreur est susceptible d'arriver au moins une fois dans la carrière de tout journaliste professionnel au amateur. Nous ne sommes pas infaillibles. Nous nous en excusons. Du moins, sommes-nous toujours, prêts à réparer nos erreurs en publiant les mise-au-point qui s'imposent. C'est ce que nous faisons ici.

*Mme. Denise Bombardier-Lamontagne*

Je crois qu'il y a eu malentendu: je pense qu'avec beaucoup de bonne volonté, vous avez voulu faire un article favorable à Cuba, mais c'était trop évident. N'importe qui pourrait dénoncer cet article comme étant de la propagande (quoique je ne crois pas que c'était là votre intention) car il recèle beaucoup d'erreurs. Cuba est un sujet trop controversé pour le prendre à la lègère et je me vois donc dans l'obligation de rectifier les affirmations que vous mettez imprudemment dans ma bouche.

Et pour commencer, quelques fausses conclusions auxquelles vous arrivez de votre propre initiative et que vous mettez toutefois entre guillemets. Et d'abord celle-ci: "il n'y a pas dans l'île un seul lopin de terre qui ne soit pas cultivé." Ne vous rappelez-vous pas que lors de notre interview je vous avais dit que 70% des terres n'étaient pas cultivées au moment du triomphe de la Révolution et que la grande majorité ne l'étaient pas encore? Vous concluez vous-même à partir d'une loi que je n'avais fait que vous mentionner cette loi interdit de posséder une terre non cultivée). Vous concluez d'ailleurs autre chose de cette loi: qu'il est évident que le jour où ces propriétaires (30% des terres cultivées sont propriété privée) décideront de ne pas cultiver la terre ils seront à leur tour expropriés." Ne savez-vous pas qu'ils ont le droit de la vendre, cette terre, si par le plus grand des hasards ils abandonnent l'agriculture? J'aimerais aussi vous faire remarquer qu'il n'y a pas non plus de lien de causalité entre cette loi et les expropriations, mais qu'elles co-existent dans

D'autres liens de causalité, vous en faites tout le long de cet article (ceux-ci n'étaient que des exemples), moi-même, qui suis allée à Cuba, je ne permettrais pas d'en faire. Mais s'il n'y avait que cela . . . Quand vous dites vrai, vous déformez la réalité soit par une demie-réalité, soit par une attitude tendencieuse ou un ton inapproprié. J'avais entrepris de corriger les faits selon le genre d'erreur que vous faisiez, mais j'ai choisi, pour plus de clarté, de réécrire l'article en répondant vraiment aux questions que vous y posez.

Je faisais partie d'un des nombreux groupes d'étudiants invités par le gouvernement cubain; le "Fair Play for Cuba" s'était occupé de l'organisation locale du voyage. Nous avons été reçus très chaleureusement, les Cubains étant d'une très grande hospitalité. Nous avons visité l'île en entier et travaillé 10 jours sur les chantiers de construction de la Cité Scolaire Camilo Cienfuegos.

Le chômage n'existe à peu près pas. Le salaire moyen de l'ouvrier est de $180 par mois, ce qui est bon, car, n'ayant pas à payer pour l'entretien de ses enfants d'âge scolaire, ce salaire se répartit entre l'impôt (11%) incluant la sécurité sociale (et c'est le seul impôt exis-

tant à Cuba), le logement (10% si l'ouvrier habite un centre construit par l'état), la nourriture, le vêtement et le loisir. La nourriture n'est pas chère (50¢ le kilo pour la première qualité de viande) et le vêtement non plus s'il est de confection domestique. Pour ce qui est des loisirs, les activités culturelles sont peu coûteuses, (le cinéma, par exemple, qui ne porte pas au fait la marque de l'influence américaine) mais les clubs de nuit le sont . . .

La semaine de travail est de 45 heures et l'ouvrier a droit à un mois de vacances par an. A travail égal, la femme gagne un salaire égal et a droit à un congé payé de 3 mois pour maternité). En cas d'absence justifiée du travail (maladie, etc.), l'ouvrier reçoit pendant trois jours son salaire complet, et ensuite 50%; cette absence n'est pas limitée. (Une augmentation de $15 est donnée pour chaque enfant. Un surplus de travail entraîne un salaire plus élevé; on considère ce système du salaire fonction du rendement comme juste car l'ouvrier est placé dans une situation de concurrence parfaite.

L'ouvrier a un rôle politique puisque chaque centre de travail élit son représentant au parti. La classe ouvrière appuie fortement la politique gouvernementale.

C'est la plus grande réussite du gouvernement Castro. La campagne d'alphabétisation en 1961 a donné des résultats incomparables puisqu'aujourd'hui seulement 1.8% de la population est analphabète, ce qui représente le taux normal des pays développés. Le budget du ministère de l'éducation est de 10% du revenu national environ mais l'éducation est aussi assurée par d'autres organismes (L'éducation artistique au Conseil National de Culture, l'éducation sportive à l'INDER*, etc. . . .); en fait environ 25% du revenu national va à l'éducation, si on compte construction, salaires, etc. . . . L'instruction est évidemment gratuite à tous les niveaux, de même que les instruments de travail scolaire. Les fils d'ouvriers et de paysans sont, en général, boursiers et forment la majorité des étudiants: ils sont logés, nourris, vêtus et reçoivent $20 par mois d'allocation. Ceux qui retournent aux études reçoivent un pourcentage de leur salaire antérieur, s'ils sont mariés. Enfin celui qui étudie l'agronomie ou la technique reçoit un salaire complet anticipé. L'étudiant ne peut recommencer une année échouée; pendant son mois de vacances, il doit suivre des cours pour repasser ses examens à la fin du mois; s'il échoue à nouveau, il sera dirigé vers un autre genre d'études (pas nécessairement de métiers manuels), ou le monde du travail.

L'originalité la plus grande du système d'éducation d'école normale. Tous les cubain réside dans le système futurs professeurs font leur première année à l'école de Minas de Frio dans la Sierra Maestra, vivant an pleine nature comme des campeurs. Ils vont ensuite pour deux ans à Topes de Collantes encore dans la montagne (Sierra de l'Escambray) mais cette fois avec plus de commodités. Puis c'est la Havane. Ce système a pour but d'habituer le futur professeur à la vie de la montagne et de la campagne et de lui donner le désir de retourner et enseigner. Ils l'ont de fait, assez souvent.

La réforme agraire a énormément amélioré le sort de

*Institut National des Sports et de l'Education Récréative.

l'ouvrier agricole en lui permettant de travailler toute l'année, alors qu'avant, l'ouvrier de la canne à sucre, par exemple, ne travaillait que 90 jours par an; le reste du temps, il s'endettait. Les terres expropriées par la premièr réforme agraire ont été aménagées selon un système de fermes collectives ou de fermes d'état. Au moment de la deuxième réforme agraire beaucoup de ces fermes collectives ont été transformées en Fermes d'état à la demande de leurs propriétaires, car ce qui les intéressait n'était pas la possession, même collective, de la terre (ils ne l'avaient jamais possédée) mais la perspective d'un salaire plus élevé et fixe, car ne dépendant pas à la base de la récolte.

Quant aux propriétaires privés, ils ont une garantie d'intégrité; ils peuvent céder leur terre en héritage ou la vendre, mais ne peuvent la diviser. Ils peuvent vendre la plus grande partie de leur récolte à qui ils veulent.

Les Cubains, en particulier de la campagne, sont très religieux; ils ont un très haut sens de la morale, hérité de la tradition espagnole. On remarque qu'ils sont très peu pratiquants, ce fait pouvant être expliqué par la rareté des églises dans la campagne. Ils subissent également l'influence de la religion africaine.

L'anticléricalisme est inexistant dans les campagnes à cause de la sympathie du bas-clergé pour la révolution; dans les villes, l'anticléricalisme est lié au fait que le haut-clergé s'est assimilé à la classe bourgeoise.

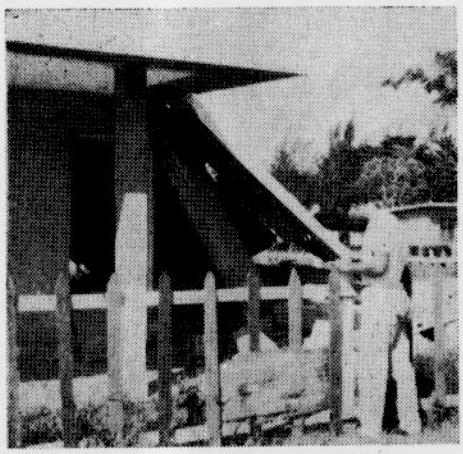
Castro est considéré comme un héros du peuple. Il fait le lien entre le peuple et le gouvernement par son rôle de chef du gouvernement révolutionnaire; Fidel, tel que tous l'appellent, dialogue avec eux et leur explique la politique gouvernementale. Le peuple, le comprenant très bien et se sentant impliqué dans cette politique, lui donne son appui. La contre-révolution, qui a connu sa période d'intensité en 1961 sous l'impulsion du CIA, semble aujourd'hui nettement en baisse. Elle a recruté ses membres surtout chez les privilégiés de l'ancien régime. Est considéré comme contre-révolutionnaire celui qui l'est de façon active.

Il est regrettable que le gouvernement américain ait une attitude aussi intransigeante envers la politique cubaine.

Je ne crois pas avoir apporté ici des développements nouveaux sur ce qu'on connaît en général sur Cuba, mais j'espère avoir établi qu'une situation politique n'est pas le sujet d'un article à sensation.

Cet article est paru dans le *Quarter Latin,* journal des étudiants de l'Université de Montréal.

BAY OF PIGS INVASION DAMAGE



**FAYE FRASER**

When I went to Cuba, one of the things in which I was most interested was the question of religious freedom. Atheistic communism is, of course, ideologically opposed to Christianity. Is there, then, religious persecution in communist Cuba, and if so, to what extent?

In answering these questions, I obtained a good deal of information from the Cuban Student Christian Movement (Movimiento Estudiantes Cristianos), a small but dynamic group, the MEC (SCM) contained what I thought to be some of the most progressively intelligent Christians in Cuba.

Our first meeting with the MEC took place a few days after our arrival in Havana, Cuba. Five of our group arranged on our own and with little difficulty, to meet with them at their headquarters in a small church. We innocently asked Jorgé, one of our young and avidly communist guides, if he was interested in accompanying us; he was, and did.

When we arrived at the church, several MEC'ers were seated outside waiting for us. Inside, in a large room, three or four sang hymns around a piano. In a corner of the same room was the entrance to a small chapel, in another, a display of books. There were approximately twenty of us altogether. After friendly introductions (most of the group had at least a basic knowledge of English), questions such as the following were discussed:

*Question*: 'Exactly how much restriction is there to religious activity? Are churches entirely free to plan activities and carry out programs unhindered by the government?'

*Answer*: 'No, not entirely. For large gatherings such as camps and conventions, permission must be obtained from the government. For regular meetings, however, such as the one we are having at this moment, permission is not required.'

*Question*: 'Is permission usually granted for such large gatherings?'

*Answer*: 'Well, that is hard to say . . .'

*Question*: 'Have you ever known of an instance where permission was actually denied?'

*Answer*: 'Well . . . not too long ago the Baptist Church requested permission to hold a church camp. Permission was granted but on condition that no one under sixteen attend the camp. And there were other instances . . .'

*Question*: 'Why was this? Does the government give reasons for refusing permission or making such stipulations?'

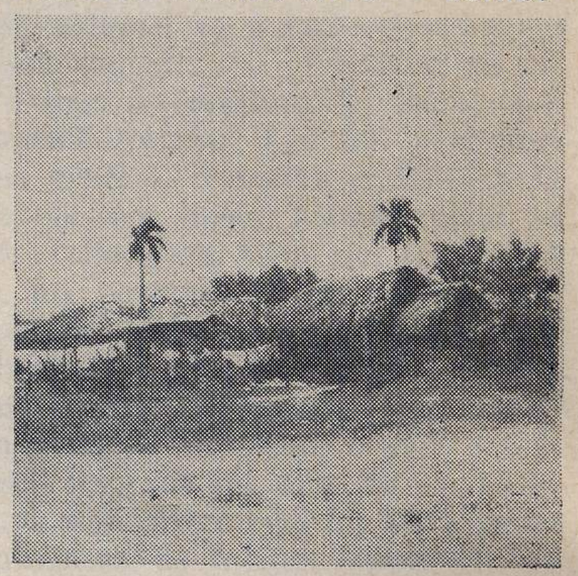
*Answer*: 'No, not usually . . .'

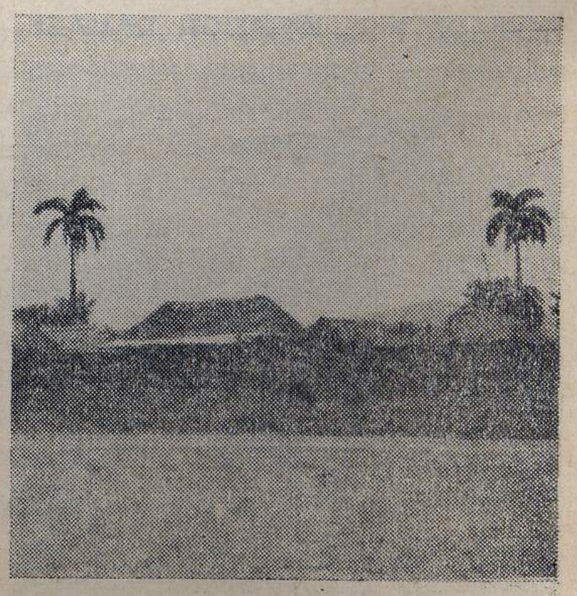
So the questions continued. Later, in private conversation, an MEC student mentioned to me that the unexpected presence of our communist government-employed guide cast a shadow of suspicion upon the group. 'There was much more that we wanted to say,' he declared.

I and another Canadian promised to meet again with the MEC (unaccompanied) after our scheduled tour of the country-side and upon our return to Havana.

All in all, this meeting aroused a good deal of mistrust, in my mind, of the Castro regime. In the next few weeks, however, our group of forty-six visited the cities of

RELIC OF FORMER DAYS — "BOHIOS"





Santa Clara, Camaguey, Camillo Cienfuegos and Santiago de Cuba where we lived, worked, and talked with the people and came to a deeper understanding of the nature of the revolution—of its present hopes, fears, and frustrations, and of its past struggles against social injustice, poverty and illiteracy. This basic understanding shed a whole new light on such questions as freedom and religion, and only in such a 'revolutionary' perspective can a fair evaluation be made of the present government and its policies.

Before 1959, the outbreak of the revolution, the Church's position in Cuba was much the same as it is in Latin America as a whole in that it paid little attention to the poverty and illiteracy of the masses. It was a bourgeois church owning substantial land and providing private schools for the well-to-do moneyed classes. The majority of Christians were Spanish and Roman Catholic and their priests were raised and educated in Spain.

Similarly, clergymen in the Protestant Church were American born and educated. The Church as a whole, therefore, was subject to foreign influence and domination.

The revolution then came along in 1959, seized private church schools and opened them for rich and poor alike. Some clergymen were imprisoned for counter-revolutionary activity; others were sent into exile. Various religious groups, however, were virtually ignored. Sydney, a graduate architect and MECer explained to me that Christians were persecuted only if they *actively* opposed the revolution. Pentecostals and Jehovah Witnesses, for example, actively opposed the government by standing up in open market places and street corners where they spoke against the revolution. They also refused to raise the Cuban flag and dissuaded people from doing voluntary work in the fields on Sunday (a project that is essential to Cuban economy).

Such groups, declared the government, sought only to confuse, divide, and perplex the ignorant and illiterate at a time when the nation's entire force was needed to establish much-needed social and economic reform. You cannot build a house, they argued, when your tools are falling apart.

Many churches, then, especially in the remote Sierra Maestra region, were closed, and active opposition was subdued.

Within the Church as a whole, there were varying reactions toward the revolution. One segment, finding meaning and relevance in the revolution and its communist ethic, repudiated Christianity in favor of this new ideology. A second body sympathized with the humaneness of the revolution but maintained Christian ideals as oppossed to a materialistic philosophy. The last, and by far the most numerous group, declared the new regime a tyrannical, atheistic dictatorship and joined counter-revolutionaries at home and abroad in plotting its overthrow. Many managed to escape with their possessions while they could.

Because of its wealth and influence in many segments of society, the Church* thus became the most powerful counter-revolutionary voice in the country. Many, in fact, who previously had no connection with Christianity, but who were disgruntled by the revolution,

found in the Church, a convenient mouth-piece for voicing grievances and for plotting against the regime.

Those dissatisfied Christians who did not manage to escape are now bitter and frustrated. I met one such person, a young artist of twenty-two, who had lived in comfort and ease before the revolution. Now he washed in hard soap and was subject to the nation-wide ration of one tube of tooth-paste a month. Consumed with chagrin, he failed to see significance in the fact that his extra two or three tubes are now being used by once-starving people who had never before seen this strange white paste.

This sort of person within the Church refuses to do anything more than is absolutely essential in support of the revolution. When the government, therefore, offered to return some of the schools which it had seized, many churches refused to accept them on the grounds that this act would be a recognition of the government of which they want no part.

With this type of thinking within the Church, and since the threat of counter-revolution is, literally, ever-present, the government is naturally wary of large church gatherings where such activity can be organized. This explains the mistrust felt by MEC students towards our communist guide. They suspected him of being a government-sponsored agent sent to report on subversive activity.

Just before leaving Cuba, I had a final meeting with Sydney in the cafeteria of our hotel. 'Exactly what attitude do you adopt toward the revolution?' I asked him. 'Can you foresee the future of the Church, and what personal difficulties and frustrations do you, a Christian, find in this society?'

'The only hope for the Church,' replied Sydney, 'lies in its ability to understand the revolution, to realize its basic humanitarian concern, and to work with it as much as it is ideologically possible. Of course, there are difficulties involved,' said Sydney. He, himself, was in favor of doing voluntary work in the fields on Sunday. 'But,' he said, 'Christians suspect me of being a communist, and fellow workers, on the other hand, are also suspicious of my intentions. But I am in favor of the revolution and I feel a mutual trust growing between me and the people with whom I cut sugar-cane. Though I am not a communist, I am in basic agreement with what the revolution is attempting and I work for it and, because of this, some Christians accuse me of being a communist.'

There are others in Cuba with a similar philosophy. A Canadian friend of mine spoke to me of Dr. Han, a brilliant Baptist Church minister whom she visited in Cuba a year ago. Dr. Han, a philosophy professor and head of the Baptist seminary in Cuba, was hired by the government to teach (non-Marxist) philosophy. The government not only paid his salary but made substantial contributions towards the upkeep of his seminary.

Furthermore, one of the MECers with whom we came in contact was a school teacher by the name of Amalia who had recently been elected a 'vanguard' worker. This is a very high honor bestowed by the government on workers who set high standards of

achievement and dedication in their work.

Is there religious freedom in Cuba? Jorgé, our communist guide, invited me and a fellow Canadian to meet his family one evening. The living-room of his Spanish-style home was typical of many we saw during our tour of the country in that the walls were full of pictures of Christ and the Saints side by side with photos of Fidel Castro and other revolutionary heroes. 'Fidel says we can be Christian and revolutionary,' said Jorgé's grandfather, and he showed us a book on Christianity and communism by Lenin.

Jorgé and his seventeen-year-old brother, though they were no longer Christians and regarded their parents as old-fashioned and naive, showed obvious affection, love and tolerance towards them.

This attitude prevails among Cubans. Exulting in new-found liberties, they are proud and anxious to demonstrate that there is tolerance and acceptance of diverging philosophies in their country. We found this attitude common as we traveled throughout Cuba. We hauled wheel-barrows, side by side, with workers who wore religious medallions around their necks. Some of us attended mass and toured through a number of churches.

What, finally, is the future of the Church in Cuba? Will it eventually die out with a last flickering, futile gasp?

Its hope, I think, lies with people like Sydney and Dr. Han and Amalia, people who are attempting to make the Church relevant and meaningful to society, and who claim that perhaps the revolution has been a good thing for the Church in waking it from its lethargy.

'Can you foresee persecution in the years ahead?' I asked Sydney.

'No,' he said, 'I cannot believe that Cubans will ever be barred from worshipping in the way they choose, as long as it isn't, of course, by setting fire to a sugar mill. I can foresee, perhaps, more obstacles in the form of social pressure, but, on the whole, I am quite optimistic about the future.'

PRESIDENT DORTICOS AND ASSOCIATES

**HANS MODLICH**

The Cuban Revolution gains in significance with each passing day, as we hear reports of similar revolutionary stirrings in virtually all parts of the globe. Needless to say Cuba is looked to by all these revolutionists as a living laboratory of social revolution. Current successes and failures of the revolution there have a direct influence on the thinking and morale of all those struggling against imperialism, whether in Asia or Latin America.

My main aim during the eight weeks was to get an understanding of the politics of the revolution, to find out what were some of the main internal problems confronting the Cubans on their road to socialism.

I won't have to repeat that the revolution has the spontaneous and overwhelming support of the Cubans, but I would like to give you an inkling of the radical,

socialist character of this support—its deep underlying political consciousness. Cubans are all in the same boat, have the same enemy, get the same essential foods. Ration cards have been described as the greatest equalizers, the greatest levelers of past privileges. A strong sense of fraternity, comradeship, products of a genuine revolution, still persist, with the sharing of common difficulties as well as joys and successes. With the exception of the gusanos (counterrevolutionaries) the Cubans will not voice their criticism of the revolution until they've made sure that you are with the revolution.

Cuban workers in showing us around their factories had much the same pride in them as a Canadian worker has in his home. Instead of "my" new freezer, however, the center of pride is "our" new 5-ton lathe made in Czechoslovakia. With 60% of industry's administrators coming directly from the rank and file, the Cuban worker feels more like his own boss and has a sense of involvement, a stake in his work, unheard of in a capitalist economy. The most vivid proof of this attitude is the fact that some 700,000 adult Cubans are presently enrolled in some form or other of studying, of furthering themselves, and the revolution.

Internationalism, a keen awareness and solidarity with what is going on in Latin America, Vietnam, Harlem, and for that matter Québec, is another feature of the Cuban revolutionary. The "Internationale" is the de jure national anthem. You just haven't heard the Internationale until you've heard 300,000 Cubans singing it on the 26th of July. My most vivid personal recollection is the time we were lugging away at Canadian flour sacks in a Havana cookie factory. Later on as we were washing up in the shower room, our Cuban companeros broke out in a burly chorus of the Internationale—we didn't need an interpreter.

It has been said that production in Cuba fluctuates with the fortunes of the world revolution—the Cubans may have considerable grounds for confidence at that. During the October crisis, production in the shops, in spite of very extensive mobilizations, is reported to have exceeded normal output. At the time of the U.S. State Department's bombing of North Vietnam or the shooting of a Cuban soldier at Guantanamo, we witnessed this same shock, the bitter contempt for the U.S. Government, and the silent determination to fight back, if necessary, to die for the revolution.

The political climate in Cuba is evidently very intense. Problems of the revolution are discussed at all levels. Criticism of leadership is usually kept under the belt until the Cubans feel that by keeping quiet any longer the revolution is in jeopardy. During the Escalante* episode, in the spring of 1962, vehement criticism was widespread among the most loyal supporters of the revolution. In his condemnation of Escalante the past secretary of ORI, forerunner of the present party, Fidel himself pointed out the crucial danger faced — that the revolution might have gone astray.

The straightening out of the Escalante affair was prompted from below, from veiled and often open demonstrations of protest against an emerging bureaucracy. A complete purge of the so-called sectarians and a reorganization of the party took place. As a consequence elections for the new party have been most democratic. Throughout the country, at factories, state farms, in the army, party members have been elected at full workers' assemblies from among the rank and file. In the same speech Fidel concluded, that as long as the revolution had the power to correct itself, so long would it be invincible.

One is often asked how, with its one party system, Cuba can be democratic or even anywhere near it. To begin with, Cubans believe that their party should be composed of all the best militants, the most able and proven revolutionaries in the country. Second, the members of the party should be chosen by popular vote by their fellow workers in the factories, farms, and even in the army. From here on the party hammers out policy and makes the decisions, based on democratic discussion of all points of view.

At the time we visited Cuba, thirty odd thousand members for the party had just been chosen, and 1966 was set as the date for the founding convention, at which time the top leadership would be elected also.

Building such a party as the Cubans visualize, after a revolution, is very complex. There are no patent mechanisms which guarantee internal democracy at the various levels, or which assure that there is a wide-ranging political consciousness. I found it most difficult to judge just how PURS is making out in all these various aspects. However I am convinced that if it develops as predicted, Cuba will be more democratic than any country in the capitalist West, with its much touted multi-party system.

Success or failure in building the party is, in my estimation, of most crucial importance for the revolution. In the Fall of 1960, when the revolution, true to its promises, implemented the agrarian reform, and the middle class elements broke with Fidel, the 26th of July movement fell apart. The traditional parties as well, were discredited and as a result, with the exception of the PSP, disintegrated. Even today the leadership of the party and of the revolution is very heavily centred on

*Anabal Escalante, former secretary of the Partido Socialista Popular, the old Cuban Communist Party, was charged with allocating influential positions to persons primarily loyal to himself. In this way he tried to set up old PSPers in positions of power.

individual leaders. Fidel is the first to point out, however, that the revolution cannot be led by individuals, no matter how much foresight and dynamism they may have. The only way to safeguard the achievements of the revolution is by having the party, the collective brain of the revolution, make the final decisions.

Fidel spends the greatest part of his time in a helicopter on trouble shooting missions. Everywhere he urges people to be on the look-out for red tape, idlers, bureaucrats, and to take matters into their own hands. He is first man at the scene of a national emergency. Fidel has no need of cultism to maintain his popularity. Busts and statues are always those of Jose Marti. When Fidel appears on the billboards you see him exhorting for some one or another revolutionary project.

The regime itself is anything but monolithic. If not formally, many different factions and opinion groups obviously exist. Cubans are doing their best to appear neutral in the Sino-Soviet dispute, although the majority appear to favor the Chinese foreign policy. Cuba's economy cannot afford to break with the Kremlin, although Cuba's disaffection in turn would be a powerful blow to the Kremlin. The Moscow-oriented tendency today is the more conservative and finds itself outflanked by the new revolutionaries on every fundamental issue.

One of the basic questions in dispute deals with the forms of incentives and economic coordination. INRA head, Rodriguez, spokesman for the old guard PSP and a few more conservative Fidelistas, advocate material incentives to spurn production. Guevara and the majority of the people from the hills, on the other hand, think that this is an unnecessary concession to individual greed. Revolutionary consciousness, the well-being of the whole economy should be the source of initiative for the worker. The only open sign of this debate is the odd polemic in *Cuba Socialista*, the party journal which you can buy at every newsstand. Then sooner or later some key figure will get fired from the government and the news spreads like wild-fire long before the dailies pick it up, usually without referring to the political implications.

This form of discussion, apart from squandering much needed administrative staff, has an even more important drawback. Debate and lessons derived from past mistakes are the most essential ingredients in furthering the political development of the up and coming generation of revolutionaries. It seems to me that political consciousness, especially among the lower echelon of the party, in the individual factories, is still too nebulous and abstracted from the real points at issue. Mass organizations like the Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, which at one point comprised three quarters of the adult population, have, after the defeat of the counter-revolution, tended to become propaganda organs under the motto of preserving unity first and foremost.

This situation is particularly well illustrated by the unions. Cuban trade unions are not, as Lenin maintained in 1921, organs to defend the interest of the workers *against* the state, even the workers' state. At the numerous factory meetings which we attended, it was quite noticeable that the unions were in practice appendages

of the administration, that the unions simply keep score of the emulation campaign, administer wage scales and distribute housing. The workers often take their complaints directly to the administration. Production meetings lacking scope and mandate are often poorly attended by the workers.

The present union structure based on Stalinist models was introduced under single slate system in 1961, during the period of maximum influence of the PSP. Today it is the centre of unanimous opposition. I heard many rumors that Lazaro Pena was going to be replaced as secretary of the trade union federation. Since our return the minister of labor who introduced the present scheme has been fired. As well, five-man councils have just been elected from the rank and file in industry and farms across the country to look after wage scales and questions of discipline.

Seemingly another obstacle in the path of the revolution is being overcome. Nonetheless some system of grass-roots political expression is an indispensable and still non-existent component of genuine workers' democracy. The Soviets, workers' councils of the early Russian Revolution, or for that matter the Algerian self-management committees, might serve as ready examples.

When all is taken into account the Cuban revolutionary leadership is still much more directly susceptible to mass pressure, and therefore more democratic than any other government in the world. I'd venture that the dillydallying going on around the flag issue in Canada would trigger a political revolution in Cuba.

Cuba brings about a revolution in one's political thinking. We are taught about "our great democratic way of life" in terms of hypothetical issues and platonic elections. Political opinion, political parties, are never portrayed in terms of strikes, workers vs. bosses, or which side the cops are on. Bourgeois democracy with its Madison Avenue "lesser evil" gimmick, is more form than substance. Cubans on the other hand have chosen with the most resolute means — they have made a social revolution. They control the means of production. Now they are in the process of building a framework that will permit the development of the real substance of democracy.

EN ROUTE TO NEXT SITE OF INTEREST

## LIONEL KEARNS

Let's take the race situation to begin with. A young visiting West Indian lawyer who had been living for the past some years in London said to me, "Cuba is the only country in the world where a black man can walk down the street without having to look over his shoulder." An overstatement, perhaps, but the speaker was well-traveled and intelligent and had spent his days looking out from under a black skin, so I took his word for it, and I can testify myself that every Negro I spoke to in Cuba was a fierce supporter of Fidel.

It's one of the major characteristics of the Cuban revolution that it is part of the contemporary world-wide

Negro revolution, perhaps the most successful part to date. In Cuba today race is no longer an issue, although whenever the question was brought up everyone talked about it without embarrassment (a situation quite different from the one I found on my later trip to Trinidad). Cubans of all extractions will talk quite openly of the pre-revolution color bar, which seems to have been, from what I could gather, in part concrete, in that Negroes were not welcome in certain traditionally white areas, Havana clubs and hotel lobbies, for example.

A young Negro poet I met, Pedro Perez Sarduy (he is also studying French literature at the university in Havana) told me that where he grew up, in the city of Santa Clara, Negroes were not permitted on the inside of the public square in the center of town. But the color bar was also a matter of attitude, the kind of thing that is certainly not foreign to Canada where we have our so-called Indian problem. In Cuba the races kept to themselves, and as the Negroes were predominantly members of the underprivileged group, one did not expect to find them in the better residential properties or holding positions of authority. Being poor, their children never got an education, and so the social stratification along color lines remained.

The revolution in a few short years has changed these traditions and attitudes to an amazing degree, and this fact explains why the colored population is solidly behind Fidel. One Negro I was talking to put it in something like these words: "Sometimes the old politicians used to make noble speeches about racial equality and even went so far as to hold up some 19th century Negro soldier as one of the fathers of our country, but nothing changed for us. The man sweeping the street was still black and the man driving down the street in a big shiny car on his way to a luxury apartment was still white. It took a while before we realized Fidel was different, that this time things were changing."

Today all outward forms of the color bar have naturally disappeared, but more significant are the new social patterns that are emerging. No Cuban I talked to thought it odd that Bertina Acevedo, a beautiful Negro actress, should play the lead in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" which has been running in Havana for several months, although there would have been very little chance of her landing such a part in pre-revolution days. Similarly, inter-racial marriage is a noticeably recent phenomenon; the mixed couples I saw were all young, their children rarely over the age of about three.

The depth of the revolution on the personal level is evidenced by the fact that people now perceive and respond to the world in different terms: instead of automatically classifying another person as "black," "white," "mulatto," etc., it is now more fitting to regard him as "Cuban" or perhaps just as "human being." No doubt the new values are not universally accepted, in fact I was told that there is still the odd racist around, but he keeps his mouth shut. In the new society racial bigotry, like any form of anti-social behavior, is genuinely unpopular. And social pressure is very strong, the adherence to revolutionary values being enforced, not by the police as the Western press would have it, but by one's friends and associates.

This sense of social pressure and strict adherence to social values on the part of individuals, especially young people, at first upset me. Comments that in a Canadian context would seem very mild often shocked those I was talking to, and I began to think that Cubans were very naive or at least lacking in a sense of humor. Gradually, however, I realized it was my own characteristic cynicism that was at the root of the trouble.

When I finally grew accustomed to their social enthusiasm and genuine faith in the revolution (and in humanity generally) I found it almost impossible to support my old point of view. Take, for example, our trip to the Topes de Collantes normal school high in the Escambre mountains, where the sign read "Welcome North American Youngs You Are Going To See The Truth Of Our Revolution"—even here enthusiasm more than compensating for lack of technical ability. Incidentally, another sign in the same vein went "Welcome Canadians, We Salute You Friendly."

The students here were between the ages of thirteen and twenty-two, and were training at a level of about grade nine or ten, Canadian. The age range reflected the fact that many had resumed their education after a lengthy interruption, and this is the general pattern all over Cuba—people taking advantage of the educational opportunities never dreamed of before the revolution.

Anyway, these were their signs, and during the day the students did their best to show us what they meant. When they found that I understood Spanish I was besieged by a horde of young supporters of the revolution, all wanting to talk and tell their stories. "We are products of the revolution," they would say; "We would not be here except for the revolution." One of the girls said she had been a stripper in the old days, and I could see, despite the baggy cotton drill shirt and pants—the soldier-type uniform that all the students wear—that she would have been particularly suitable for this line of work. Somebody's loss, I mused half regretfully, but Cuba's gain.

Later, one of the students who was talking to me in private asked me what salary Canadian teachers received. I gave him an estimate, and after considering it for a while we worked it out at about twice the salary a Cuban teacher could expect. At this the student became highly defensive saying that in the new society that they were building money was of no importance anyway.

"We can all live with dignity and honor without the

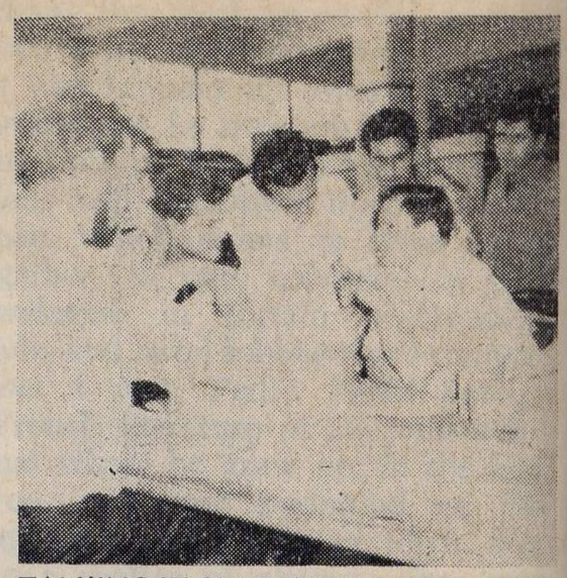
need of money now," he said. "Before the revolution money was everything; now it is nothing." Pretty strong words for a teenager, but he was deeply serious, and was determined to spend the rest of his life teaching in the remotest parts of the mountains. He knew what he was in for too; he'd been living in the mountains for three years already: one year at the primitive Minas del Frio site in the Sierra Maestra (which we later visited) and two years here in the Escambres.

The students at Topes de Collantes wanted us to be sure to tell everyone the truth when we got back home, the truth about them and their country. I found this same concern on the part of many people. It arose from the feeling that their country was being maligned and misrepresented in all the non-socialist world. I remember one night at the university dorms at Santiago de Cuba where we were living I was with a group of Cuban students listening to a radio trying to pick up some dance music. We happened to tune in on a non-Cuban station giving a political broadcast — it may have been the Spanish language Voice of America or perhaps some Central American station — but it was the usual line about the "oppressed people of Cuba and the necessity to wipe the scourge of Communist tyranny from the hemisphere," etc. The students thought this very funny, but their second reaction was more serious. They asked me if this kind of attitude, which puzzled them as much as it insulted them, was prevalent in Canada.

What could I say? I'd heard and read the same kind of thing in Canada. "How can they be so narrow?" said one of the students. From my own point of view, having then been in Cuba for over three weeks, it seemed like utter madness, but now that I am once more back in the "free" world I find this kind of attitude the one which shapes and informs the mass of public opinion.

How upset people become when I tell them things are going well in Cuba. They either dismiss my statements as lies or else grind their teeth and take a great dislike to me. Inevitably they change the subject. I sympathize with them to some extent. To accept the truth about Cuba is to lose faith in the integrity of North American mass media. It's a hard step to take.

In Cuba, mass media are government controlled and there seems to be some screening of world events. There was no report, for example, of the U.S. moon shot that took place while I was there. Maybe it wasn't considered newsworthy. But one definitely gets a different slant on things in any case. Commercial advertising is non-existent in Cuba, and this fact really hits you when you arrive. Very few neon signs jump up at you in Havana, and on the radio the singing commercials tell you to put out the dog and cat at night and scrub the baby. But there is nothing of the psychological bombardment we are accustomed to in North America persuading us through every devious means that unless we buy the latest goods and gadgets (even the most absurd things, like girdles for skinny women) we are social monsters. Of course in Cuba there is no surplus of goods so there wouldn't be much point in this kind of motivation anyway, but I must say that in some respects, such as the women consequently



TALKING IT OVER WITH ANDRE JOFFE

being unburdened by all those straps and braces, the aesthetic effect is overwhelming.

The advertising that exists is all socially directed, the people being encouraged to work hard and make do with as little as possible in order to build up the economic strength of the country. It's difficult to judge how effective this kind of appeal is and how much it contributes to the attitudes of the people, but I talked with students who were proud that they had not used up all their shirt coupons for the year, and a surprising number of people, students and workers alike, spend a considerable amount of their spare time participating in volunteer work programs. One Friday evening sitting on a concrete wall of the breakwater that skirts one side of Havana harbor I watched hundreds of trucks full of voluneer workers pulling out for a week-end work project in the country.

There's political propaganda too, of course, the kind of thing I can remember we had during the Second World War—V for Victory, Buy Bonds, etc., only in Cuba the signs and billboards proclaim *Patria o Muerte, Venceremos* (Homeland or Death, We Will Win) or *Paz con Dignidad* (Peace with Dignity) or *Cuando Vienen Estamos Listos* (When They Come We Are Ready). A great deal of the popular music on the radio has this kind of twist also. Folk songs tell of heroes in the mountains who fought the tyranny or of the devoted young student teacher who during the year of alphabetization was murdered by counter-revolutionaries.

Some of the popular songs get a bit corny when they exhort young people to give up carousing and become exemplary students, but there are some funny ones too, like the cha-cha (I think) called "Goldwater the atomic madman" (*atómico-loco*). Besides these there are several different patriotic anthems that are played over incessantly and sung on every possible occasion. A Cuban reporter told me that he couldn't stand any more patriotic songs, he'd had enough—they're terrible, terrible he said, but I noticed the night we were all watching Raul Castro's speech on T.V. after the American shooting of the Cuban guard over the fence at the Guantanamo Base, Rual making the speech over the casket of the dead soldier, by the time the crowd was singing the *International* the same reporter had tears in his eyes. He told me afterwards that he felt the soldier's death as though he were his own brother.

As I said before it's impossible to be cynical in Cuba. As soon as you look around and take account of what is actually happening you cannot fail to be inspired. After my Cuban visit I spent a few weeks in Trinidad, and the contrast between the two Caribbean islands was distressing. In spite of the fact that Trinidad is well developed and rich in natural resources there is still a great deal of poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. The whole social atmosphere is characterized by racial animosity, stagnation and frustration.

Children follow in the same tired and narrow patterns as their parents, opportunities for young people being especially lacking. At the time I was there the results of the national "Eleven Plus" were being awaited. Out of the 5,000 eleven-year-olds who wrote the exam approximately 1,000 would be able to go on to secondary institutions. That's all; for the others that is the

end of their education, except for a few rich ones that can afford to go to private secondary schools, notorious institutions run by teachers who do not have enough enducation themselves to get jobs in the public school system.

It is easy to see why so many young people would like to emigrate, but now there is no place for them to go since England closed the door. The only ones that get away are those who have managed to qualify themselves sufficiently to be accepted by a foreign university. And, because few of them return, this has the effect of draining the country of its brightest people, those who are especially needed for teachers. There is no program of adult education, in fact there is great difficulty in getting any kind of academic training after one has reached a certain age. Students, for example, are obliged to leave school after their eighteenth birthday. It is a pretty sad state of affairs for someone who has just come from Cuba.

## PAUL COPELAND

In starting to write an article on Cuba, I found that my impressions and ideas about Cuba had never been sufficiently pondered to produce a decision of any sort. My overall impression was favorable but with some reservations and questions left in my mind.

In an attempt at objectivity I will pass along some of my experiences and leave the evaluation of them to the reader.

I think it is necessary to first answer a question that has been asked by everyone to whom I have talked concerning my trip to Cuba. They all asked whether I was free to go where I wanted and see what I wanted and talk to whom I wanted. To answer this question it is necessary to describe briefly the nature of the tour.

The trip was made up of 45 persons, 29 boys and 16 girls. In order to provide room and board for the group, the Cubans found it convenient to keep the group together and at one hotel, university dorm or workers' dorm, wherever we were staying.

In this group we stayed in most of the major cities of Cuba. Our time in the cities was divided into organized tours to schools, universities and events like the ballet or the theatre. Spare time was allowed in the program and all tours were optional. We were free to travel and talk and do as we wished. The only places that were off limits were the missile bases, Guantanamo Naval Base, and the political prisons.

To my mind the most crucial point about the Cuban revolution and the one with which our friends to the south seem to take greatest issue is justice and liberties in Cuba. As you will see in the other articles in this booklet, the revolutionary government has produced many admirable results and undertakings. My major concern as a law student and a human being is whether these results are being achieved at a high cost to individual freedom. To try to reach a decision on this point

was difficult. I felt that a twofold approach to the problem was necessary. One was questioning of the people who are opposed to the regime, the other was a talk with government officials.

One problem with talking to government officials is that they may be lying. I don't think the Minister of Justice under the Nazi regime would have admitted they were liquidating the Jews; and likewise, if the Castro government is persecuting certain members of their society for their political beliefs, I am certain they would not admit it. With this in mind I would like to give you my impressions of a talk with the Minister of Justice, Alfredo Yabur. I found Mr. Yabur a very warm man, very enthused with his job and given to a Cuban trait of answering all questions with extremely lengthy answers. His approach to non-political criminal procedure struck me as progressive. His approach to bail on one's own recognizance rather than on money is similar to the one presently being considered by the Law Society of Upper Canada.

With political crimes the approach varies. The revolutionary government has no constitution, and there are no freedoms guaranteed as (in theory at least) in the American constitution or as in Canada by common law and perhaps by the Bill of Rights of Mr. Diefenbaker.

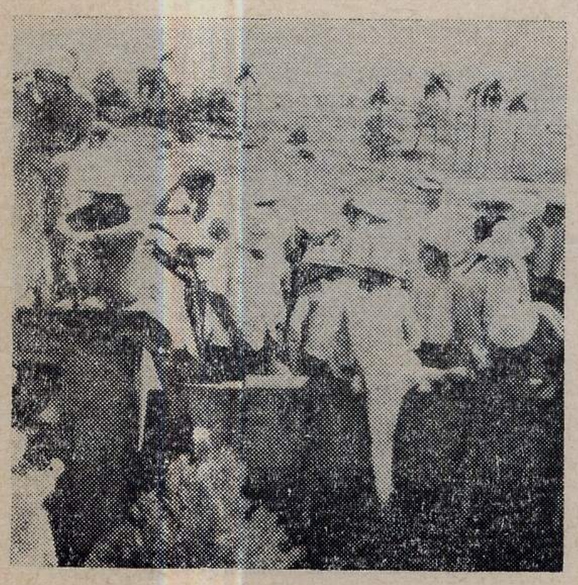
Persons suspected of counter-revolutionary activity are held incommunicado as long as is necessary to round up other suspects. This is at best an unfortunate but necessary result of the virtual state of war between Cuba and the United States. May I also point out that the members of the FLQ were held in a similar manner in Montreal.

I was told that the death penalty was only given for counter-revolutionary crimes when a person was killed during the commission of the crime.

Political prisoners, upon completion of a re-education period to show them the aims of the revolution, are eligible for parole.

On the personal level I talked with many persons opposed to the revolution. Since my Spanish is very limited, almost everyone I spoke to at length spoke English. All the people opposed to the revolution that I met were middle-class before the revolution. They all complained of the food being worse, of food rationing, of difficulty obtaining clothes and of the non-existence of certain consumer goods (formerly imported from the United States).

One elderly man complained at the pool side of the Hotel Nacional that the government men were killers and thieves. I asked him what would happen if he were overheard, and he replied that they would shoot him. I then asked him if he thought that I, as guest of the government, would not be likely to be sufficiently pro-revolution to report him. He looked at me strangely and moved away to the other side of the pool. He was either a brave man, a liar, or a fool.



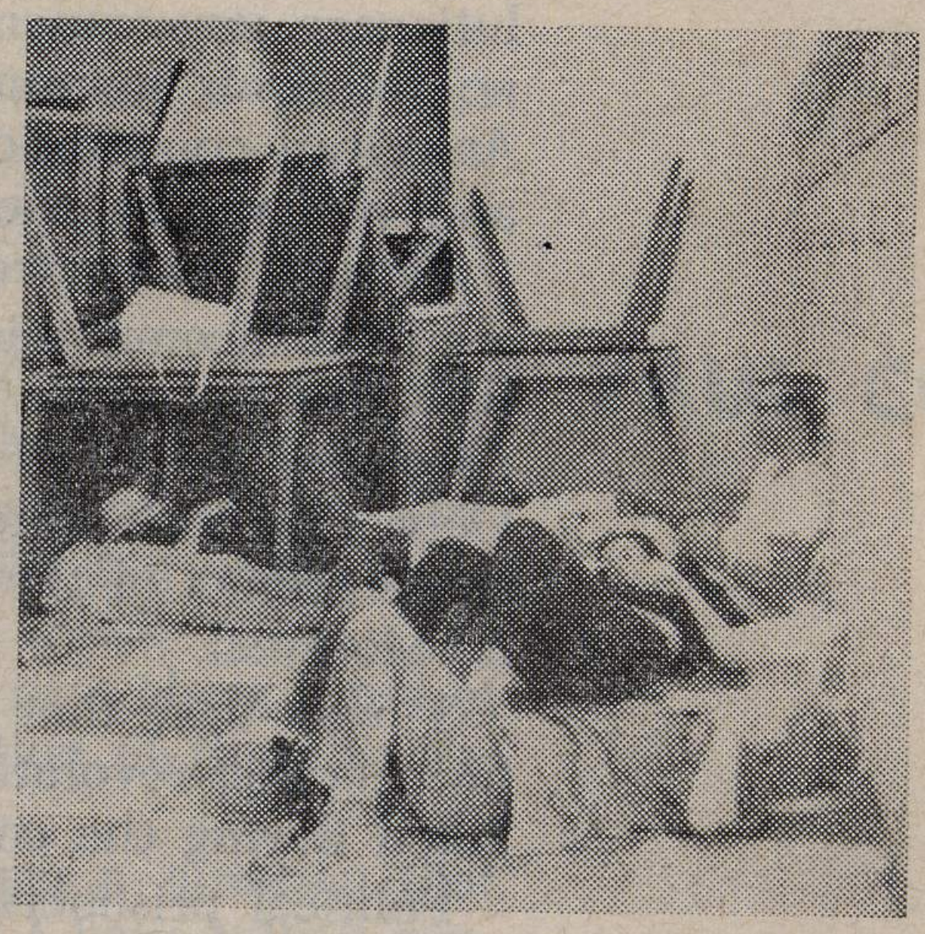
On the beach at Veradero I talked to a high school teacher who said there was no freedom of speech or freedom of the press, but he talked freely and said other Cubans knew of his opinions.

The most unsettling experience I had came in Santiago. One night during the carnival I was talking to a uni-

versity student who was strongly opposed to the regime. I wanted to continue the conversation at the University, but he said he was afraid to come up there, and we parted. Two nights later I saw him at the ballet, and when I approached him to talk he whispered he could not talk now, and fled. Perhaps he was engaged in sabotage, perhaps not. At any event he was very frightened for a reason I do not know.

My last contacts with people who were opposed to the revolution were in Havana. Some of the children of the remaining wealthy families freely expressed opinions against the government. They were planning on leaving the island within the next four months to a year, and they seemed unconcerned who heard what they said.

On the whole I am forced to disagree with the Americans who claim that the island is one gigantic prison and that everyone wants to leave. In my opinion the majority of people support the government and are happy working for the new Cuba.



From time to time, we read in our newspapers and hear on our news broadcasts how horrible the new Cuba is. These reports often relate that thousands are fleeing and still more thousands are starving and being shot by the present military dictatorship. We hear every day about Cuban tyranny, Cuban injustice and Cuban slavery. However, this summer 45 Canadian students, 84 American students, and 15 English students spent two months in Cuba. The Canadian tour was sponsored by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, and all three tours were completely paid for by the Cuban government.

While in Cuba, we toured the whole island staying at different places. We talked, worked, and celebrated with Cubans from all walks of life. I feel that we Canadian students grew to know Cuba as well as anyone could in our two month stay.

We all felt that our press is lying about the existing conditions in Cuba, and therefore the Canadian public

**SHARON WOOD**

has a completely wrong idea of what Cuba is actually like. In this article I will try to iron out some of these misconceptions.

Yes, there certainly are people who have left Cuba. The Cubans explained to us that these people were those with money and position. They owned hotels or businesses. However, let us not forget that this class of people were the minority. The majority, if they were lucky, worked a few months of the year. A Cuban peasant would usually send his daughter to Havana to become a prostitute—there, at least, she would be able to eat and have a roof over her head. I think everyone is aware what Havana was—the center of prostitution, gambling and corruption. Many Cubans were completely illiterate and many died of starvation and curable diseases.

Now, five years later, the people are free from hunger, illiteracy, misery and corruption. Yes, there are arms in Cuba, but these arms are in the hands of the people, not just the heads of government. They are willing to give their lives at an instant to defend what they have built in the past five years. They know that what they have built and are continuing to build is, for the first time in their history, what they can truly claim to be theirs. The only shooting we heard about was that of the young Cuban soldier, 19, who was shot and killed by an American soldier at Guantanamo base.

We were all impressed by the spirit and enthusiasm the people possess for building socialism in their country. It is extremely difficult to adequately express, in such a short article, the atmosphere of the Cuban Revolution. However, I think a comment on the educational system is necessary for a better understanding of this enthusiasm.

Five years ago there was 40-45% illiteracy in Cuba, now it is less than 2%. Almost everyone in Cuba is studying; in the factories there are special classes at night; on farms and other work centers, it is common to see classrooms. Most of the people are striving to complete the sixth grade. They are older people who had absolutely no education before the Revolution. However, the role that education plays in Cuba today is undeniably reflected in the youth, more so than in the older people.

The Cuban government has granted 150,000 scholarships. When I say scholarships, I don't want you to think of the type of scholarships available in Canada. In Cuba, these scholarships are granted on need—need before academic achievements. Therefore, if a student comes from a poor family he has a guarantee of an education, whereas, in Canada if one happens to come from a poor family, he must make excellent marks or else drop out of university. With scholarships, in Cuba, education is free—free clothes, free board, free books, etc., $30 a month spending money plus three paid holidays a year to any resort in Cuba.

No wonder the young people of Cuba have such a wonderful, alive spirit—when five years ago they had nothing, nothing but hunger, sickness and want. Now they have a future; they have a reason to live. The Cubans themselves often say "the Youth are the hope of the world."

# ROGER BRUNET

There are specific impressions that come to my mind when I think of Cuba.

Like the twenty-nine-year-old woman in the Sierra Maestras. When I met her she was beating clothes on a smooth rock by a fast flowing mountain stream and smoking a cigarette. The cigarette stuck precariously to her lips as she scrubbed vigorously the oily white soap against a white shirt. Cubans are not self-conscious and she wasted no time telling me about herself.

Would a woman from Arnprior or Burlington tell me about herself? After all one can't talk about the weather all the time. Anyway it turned out that she had been married at thirteen and that her husband had deserted her before the revolution. Living with her sister and her family, they were seventeen in a small single story wooden cabin. Under these conditions I wondered what she would think of Castro and the revolution.

Dragging on the cigarette, she told me the revolution was wonderful. Why? Because she washed clothes for a teachers' school, Minas del Frio, and every month she received a package of clothes for the children as well as a small welfare allowance. Things were working out. Little by little she and her family had adapted and there was a feeling of identity with a Cuba that was adapting also.

It is difficult to explain the feeling of going, of action, of achievement, that one feels in Cuba. They go, they act, they achieve. Schools, hospitals, recreation centers: the things we fortunate Canadians take for granted.

The things we take for granted are surprising. Like churches. Anywhere you go in Cuba there are open churches and the hours of the mass, of confession, and of prayer are clearly posted. For those who desire to practice their religion, the opportunity is there to do so freely and openly. It is also true, on the other hand, that religion is not taught in any school in Cuba, unless it is a school in a private religious community, and there are few of those. Instead we find a Marxist-oriented curriculum but it is not until university that we find a course in dialectical materialism. We orient our curriculums also; every country in the world does, so it should be no surprise to see them teach in Cuba what they happen to believe.

What was surprising was an old-age home in Camaguey. I dropped in one afternoon unexpectedly and spent the next nine hours talking to the pensioners about the conditions, their past lives and their future hopes. Rabbits, cats and ducks played on the lawn while some of the more talented oldsters brought out their guitars to serenade the companero from Canada. It was in this old age home, state administered, that I saw a chapel to the Virgin Mary. The candles were lit and flickering, and for a second the nostalgia of Old Mexico swept over me. Why should the government allow a chapel in a state institution? The pensioners could not adapt to a non-religious environment, someone said, and therefore the practice of their religion kept them happy and mentally healthy. To some people little things mean a lot.

Little things can be books and the second hand bookstores of Havana are magnificently chaotic. Books are literally piled from floor to ceiling with only their sides

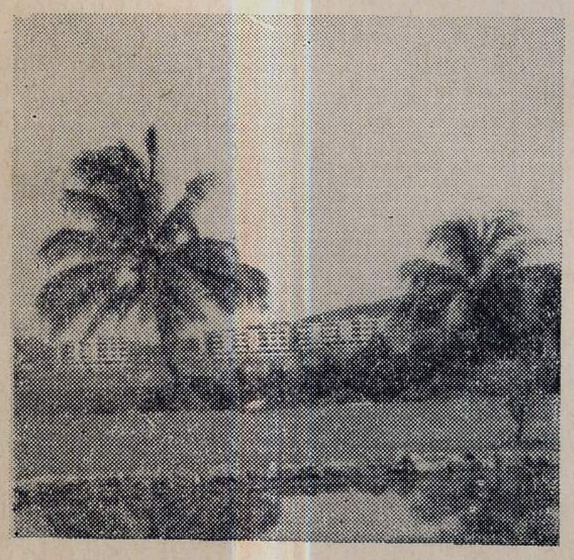
showing. It takes a man with a computer mind to deal with an environment like that. Amidst works on spiritualism, scientific theories, Greek gods, and Cuban heroes, I discerned an old dog-eared 1957 *Fortune* magazine which was selling for one dollar, and a 1958 *Atlantic Monthly* that sold for the same price. The blockade makes it difficult to procure books.

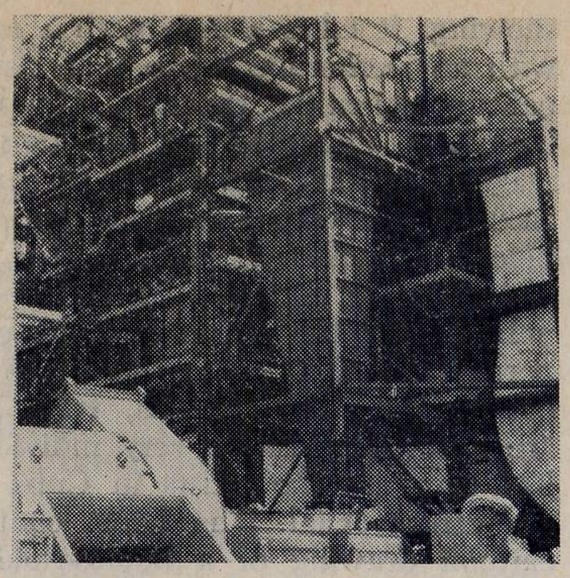
Artists are certainly interested in books if they are normal, and the artists in Cuba certainly appear to be normal. By that I mean they are individuals and nonconformists. The Spanish, from whom many Cubans are descended, are a very individualistic race anyway. Not only are the artists in Cuba individuals, but they are controversial. The latest controversy dealt with a cartoon drawing of a homosexual holding a pansy in his hand: this appeared in the *Gaceta* of July 5th, '64, the official organ of the Union of Writers and Artists. The cartoon immediately drew criticism to the effect that this was not art and leads to the corruption of young minds. Of another opinion were the free thinkers who felt that all universal themes such as homosexuality and incest could certainly be represented if they gave aesthetic pleasure or instruction. So the controversy raged.

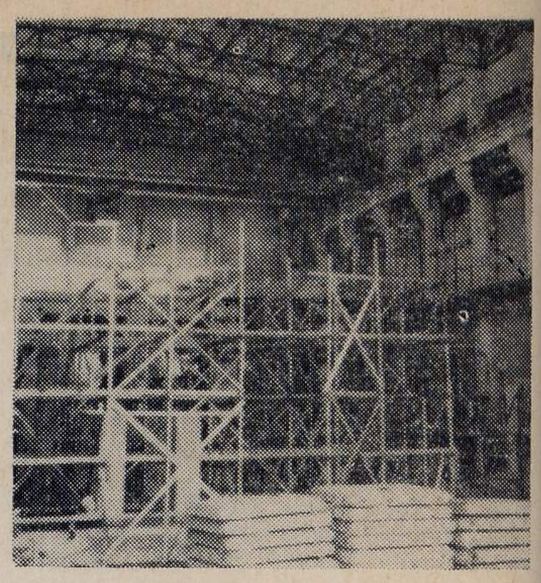
This is, I think, a very healthy situation. Sexual freedom of expression is closely correlated with religious freedom; where you find one you find the other.

Yet this is not to say that Cuba is squandering its artistic talent on paltry issues such as the artistic worth of a cartoon showing a homosexual. On the contrary. Cuba possesses a gifted young group of writers which would make any nation proud. For example there is Alejo Carpentier who was a finalist in the Salzburg Literary Award contest for his work "El Siglo de las luces," Lisandro Otero who wrote "La Situacion," Virgilio Pinera, Oscar Hutardo, etc. Novelists, poets, playwrights, painters, they are all creating and thriving. Canada with its brave nineteen million people is hard put to advance one or two first-rate novelists and the other disciplines are just as poor. It is a curious generality to say that Cuba has a greater quantity and quality of literary artists than Canada, but I am going to say it. Unless you read Spanish, you will have to take me at my word. And if you do read Spanish, don't take me at my word. Read for yourself. It is worth it.

Cuban literature is for the moment divided into two schools of writers. These are, the writers of realism like Otero and Desnoes, and the writers of the absurd like Arrufat, Pinera, Hurtado. Satire at the moment is







undeveloped, for the revolution and its institutions are too new to be part of a tradition of manners.

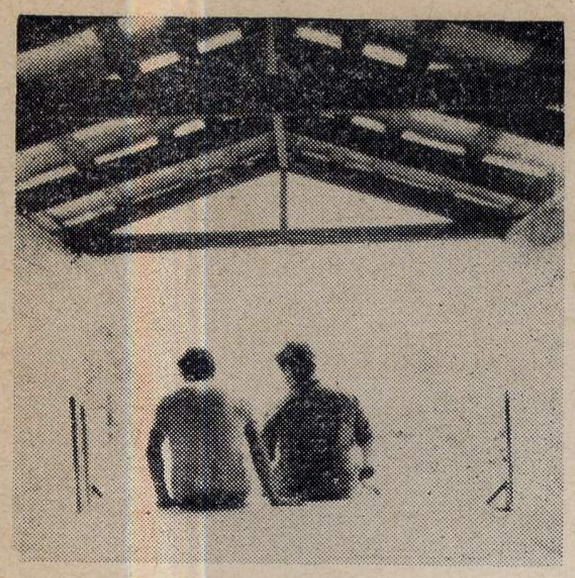
Also about art: there are five dance groups touring Cuba and just recently they had a symphonic orchestra touring through the country, which is the first time this has happened in Cuba's history.

Individualism can appear unexpectedly. In Havana, just prior to my departure for Canada, I was aching from an ear infection. A government driver drove me immediately to a hospital, and upon entering into the chief nurse's office, he flashed his government identity card and demanded a doctor promptly for the Canadian invitado. In front of the chief nurse's office sat a waiting line of patients, many of whom had been waiting for quite some time and were much worse off than I was. The result of this authoritarian demand by my government driver was unexpected for both of us: she kicked him politely out of the office with the words: "A body is a body, so let him wait like the rest."

I could hardly keep myself from bursting out into laughter, or congratulating her upon the democratic handling of her profession. The driver, immensely mortified, promised to call the powers that be about her head. She coolly ignored him and after an hour long wait we finally saw the doctor. As I waited in the reception room a middle-aged married woman studied her mathematics lessons on her knees.

Reading and studying is a familiar sight all over Cuba. Elevator boys are busily studying the ups and downs of Russian; housewives, soldiers, everyone (or almost everyone), seems to be studying. On passing a railroad station warehouse one day I spied a group of men behind well-used school desks, busily applying themselves to Spanish and Math lessons. It turned out that for one and a half hours a day, five days a week, these Syndicate railroad workers studied, on government time, with government books; also, no tuition fee. The aim of these workers was to reach the grade six level. Cuba is presently striving to educate her citizens to a grade 6 level. Vast, heartening progress has been made, for just a few years ago the objective had been grade three. Outside the warehouse, the struggle between the old and the new was concretely demonstrated: a very overworked 1928 steam locomotive struggled bravely up the track while modern diesels gleamed.

Anywhere one goes in Cuba one can expect the unexpected. One thing is sure: individuality prevails.



## who's who...

CHRISTOPER FAHRNI, 22, hails from Vancouver, where he has studied literature and political science at the University of BC. He has been active in the Student Christian Movement and has worked two years on the staff of the UBC campus newspaper, the *Ubyssey*.

BRIAN RANDS is a 17-year-old high school student at the Sheldon Williams Collegiate in Regina, Saskatchewan. He has been politically active since an early age, having been a New Democratic Youth club president and publicity chairman for two years. He has also been active in the Regina area anti-war movement as a supporter of C.U.C.N.D.

ROGER A. BRUNET at 22 is an honours English student at Carleton University in Ottawa. He has been active in campus organizations, including the World University Service, and has served as an officer in the Newman Club and Carleton Spanish Club. He is fluent in Spanish. Roger Brunet writes frequently for campus and Ottawa daily newspapers.

FRED STEVENSON, whose photography is featured in this pamphlet, is an engineering student at Carleton University in Ottawa. He is photo editor for the campus newspaper *The Carleton* and staff photographer for another publication, the *Raven,* as well as being a part-time photographer for the daily *Ottawa Journal.* He is also a member of the campus Newman Club and CUES. He is 21.

SONIA PUCHALSKI is enrolled in the Faculty of Arts & Science at the University of BC in Vancouver. She is 20 years old. Active in various anti-war groups on and off campus such as the CUCND and the League for Total Disarmament, she has been active in the New Democratic Youth and as an editor of the *Young Socialist Forum.*

BILL JOHNSTON is a 16-year-old student at Nutana High School in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where he is enrolled in a general course. Bill likes sports and has a particular interest in current world events.

RUTH TATE is a 24-year-old graduate from the Faculty of Librarianship at the University of BC, Vancouver, now continuing a post-graduate course there. She has been active in the campus New Democrat (NDP) club as an executive member for two years and as an editor and co-founder of *Young Socialist Forum.* She has written for the campus paper, the *Ubyssey,* as an assistant editor and features department writer as well.

LAWRENCE BANKS, age 21, has completed four years study in psychology and sociology at Acadia University in Nova Scotia. He has been active in the World University Service of Canada, C.U.S.O., an editor of the Student Directory and a member of campus psychology, drama and judo clubs.

MICHAEL BROWN is a 16-year-old high school student at the W. D. Lowe Technical School in Windsor, Ontario. He is interested in mechanical engineering. Michael was in a good position to assess changes in the Cuban scene as he had been in Cuba twice before—in July 1959 and in July and August 1962.

Now completing her high school studies at North Vancouver Senior Secondary School, JACQUIE HENDERSON, 17, has taken part in the activities of the Vancouver branch of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee and has been a member of the New Democratic Youth for a number of years.

A practising psychologist in Montreal, MICHELLE SAUNIER earned her Doctorate in Psychology at the Université de Montréal. While on campus, she was active in numerous organizations, among them the Mouvement Laique de Langue Française, the Association de Prof. des écoles normales de la P.Q., the Association Canadienne de Pschologie, and the Corporation des Psychologues du Quebec.

LIONEL KEARNS is a 28-year old graduate of the University of BC in Vancouver, where he earned an MA in English literature. At present he is on a Canada Council Scholarship studying linguistics at the London School of Oriental & African Studies in Great Britain. Active in the Writer's Workshop and the Graduate Student's Association at UBC, Lionel has also had his poetry published in *Prometheus*: *The Young Socialist Quarterly* (*Vancouver*), *Poetry '64,* and *Tamarack Review*. He speaks Spanish and French, and has lived in Mexico.

RACHEL AZMIER is a 21-year-old graduate in English Literature from Carleton University, Ottawa. Rachel Azmier has been active in the Freedom From Hunger Campaign, the Canadian Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and the dramatic club on Carleton campus.

Among the ten French-Canadian students who went to Cuba was LISE ROCHON. In her twentieth year, she has just completed a three year course in political science at the University of Montreal. Lisé's interests are very wide — they embrace politics, anthropology, music and languages—and of course, as you would expect, she is active in AGEUM—L'Association Général des Etudiants de l'Université de Montréal.

FAYE FRASER, age 21, has completed her fourth year in the Faculty of Arts at St. John's College, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg. She has participated in the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and has served on the executive of the U. of M. Student Christian Movement.

HANS MODLICH is a 21-year-old electrical engineering student at the University of Toronto. He is a past president of the Rosedale New Democratic Youth and vice-president of U. of T. New Democrats. He has been an active supporter of the CUCND on campus, and is now vice president of the U. of T. Socialist Club. Having participated in committee work in Toronto and helped form the U. of T. Student Committee on Cuban Affairs, he has taken a serious interest in Cuban developments.

24-year-old PAUL COPELAND is a graduate in physics at the University of Waterloo, who is presently studying at Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto. He is a former publicity director of the University of Waterloo Students Council.

SHARON WOOD is a 19-year-old graduate high school student at King Edward Continuing Education Centre. She plans to continue at the University of BC. She has been a student delegate to the United Nations Organization and is a member of the Renfrew New Democratic Youth club. She has also been associated with the Canada-China Friendship Association and the Canadian Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament.

Cuba's Minister of Industries, Major Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's Address To The United Nations General Assembly, *December 11, 1964* .20

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FIDEL TAKING TIME OUT, AFTER HIS JULY 26 ADDRESS AT SANTIAGO, TO PLAY BALL WITH THE CANADIANS.

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